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A B R I E F
EXPLICATION
O F T H E
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

By QUESTION and ANSWER.

To which are added

Eight S E R M O N S

On plain and practical Subjects.

By the late Reverend JOHN NEWSON,
M. A. Rector of CONINGTON in Cam-
bridgeshire, and Vicar of ELM cum
EMNETH in the Isle of Ely.

S H E F F I E L D :

Printed by W. WARD; and sold by H. PAYNE in London,
and Mess. MERRILL and SON in Cambridge.



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A Brief Explication, &c.

LET me ask you, Fidelio, said Evergetes to him as they were walking together, whence are all these things which we see around us?—who commanded those heavenly lights to shine?—who made the hills to rise, and the vallies to sink down?—who taught the waters to flow, and cloathed the fields with verdure?—who formed those various tribes of Animals, by which the Earth, the Air, and the Waters are inhabited?—In particular, who created me and the rest of mankind, and gave us all those powers and faculties which we so richly enjoy?

It seems somewhat strange, replied Fidelio, that you, who are not entirely unacquainted with the Scriptures, should ask me a question, which stands resolved in the very front of your bible. However, without examining farther into the reason of it, I shall answer your enquiry, and tell you, that it was God; who, being of a nature Infinitely good and perfect, was willing to impart existence and happiness to all his creatures. With this view he gave us
A Being,

2 *A BRIEF EXPLICATION of*

Being, and created things about us in such manner that they might be serviceable for our outward accommodation, as well as our inward improvement. Accordingly we are told, that *he that buildeth all things is God, —that by wisdom he founded the Earth, and by understanding he established the Heavens—*that he spake the word and they were made, he commanded and they were created.—And this he did, not in his own person, but by the ministration of his Son, by whom he created all things both in Heaven and in Earth; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were made by him.

Quest. As you have been so kind as to answer me this question, I hope you will indulge me in a few others. Did God require nothing of mankind after he had created them?——Did he leave them to themselves, to act just as their own inclinations or humours should prompt them, without any rule to direct, any law to oblige, or any motives to influence their conduct? Or did he lay them under any restraint, or make any Covenant or conditions with them?

Answ. God having created man, and placed him in Paradise, gave him a law as a proof and trial of his obedience, and appointed

pointed Death as the penalty of transgressing it.——“*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*”

Quest. I suppose then we shall find Adam persisting most inviolably in this obedience, since not only his Duty, but his Interest likewise required of him to do so. And yet, when I consider the frequent instances of mortality in the world, it creates some kind of suspicion, and makes it seem not altogether unreasonable to ask you, whether he did or not.

Ans. Your suspicion is but too justly founded; for neither duty to his Maker, nor gratitude for those benefits which he had received from him, nor yet his own Interest in the continuance of them, were restraints sufficient to keep him from offending. He broke through them all, and by his disobedience made both himself and us liable to the consequences of it.

Quest. Before we proceed any farther, give me leave to ask you, what we are to understand by that Death and Misery to which mankind became thus liable by the transgression of their first Parent.

Ans. Some have affirmed that by Death are meant the pains and miseries of Hell-fire,

4 *A BRIEF EXPLICATION of*

fire, threatened to all impenitent sinners under the Gospel. But as the scripture makes mention of nothing more than natural death, and the mere ending of that life which was the gift of God to mankind, and, during the respite of this sentence, the pains, the labour, and the hardships of this present world, we cannot with justice affirm any thing farther to be understood.

That nothing more than this can be meant, seems farther reasonable, because this is represented as coming upon us by the sin of Adam; whereas it seems scarce agreeable to our natural notions of justice, that God should punish us with endless and inexpressible torments, for a fault which we had no share in the commission of; and which, had it been proposed to us, we might perhaps have rejected with abhorrence.

Quest. But supposing natural death only to be inflicted by this sentence, and nothing farther to have been meant by it, will it not still seem inconsistent with Justice, for God to punish us in any manner for a fault committed, not by ourselves, but by another? Let the soul that sinneth die; but when punishment is inflicted on the innocent, does not this seem unequal?

Answ. That Adam's sin was attended with

with consequences which affect all his posterity, is a most certain truth ; but then these consequences are not to be esteemed a punishment. Death indeed was a punishment inflicted upon Adam ; and if it has pleased God to continue it to all his posterity, not now as a punishment, but only as the natural consequence of his mortality, how is this inconsistent with Justice ? Had God immediately executed his sentence on Adam, without any respite, we could never have come into Being, or been capable of any enjoyments at all.

Besides, as life is the free gift of God to all living creatures, and what no one has originally any right to claim at his hands ; so may he, whenever he thinks fit, withhold or take it from them, without any just cause of complaint given even to the most innocent.

Mankind then, by the sin of Adam, are in no worse condition than they might have been placed in without it. They are mortal now, and so they might have been at first created, whether Adam had sinned or not. There is no injustice therefore, if, for wise reasons, God has taken occasion, from the sin of Adam, to do that, which he might as equitably have done without it ; or if he has made it serviceable for the display of his perfections,

perfections, or the promoting useful designs and purposes in the world.

Quest. But are there any such wise reasons to be assigned? Or can you shew me how the forfeiture of life by the sin of Adam tends to promote such useful purposes as you mention?

Ans. Yes.—It gives occasion for the display of the riches of God's grace, and serves to make his mercy and loving kindness towards mankind more regarded and taken notice of in the world, than perhaps they otherwise would have been. God has thought fit, that his excellencies and perfections should be made known and discovered to us, not by the use of Reason only, which is the province but of very few, and even by them too often neglected and disregarded; but by visible manifestations and sensible instances of them, as things better fitted to have an effect upon us, and more apt to be taken notice of by mankind. Thus, his Power is seen in the creation of all things, — his Wisdom in the infinite variety, the wonderful contrivance, the beautiful order and universal harmony of them, — his Providence in his upholding them, and in such acts of government as the happiness and well-being of his creatures require. So also his mercy and compassion toward us
could

could never have been shewn in so sensible a manner, nor would probably have been so much regarded in the world, had he not made use of some such occasion as this to display it by. Besides by the loss of any advantage, we are usually made more sensible of it's importance to us: When we have smarted for any thing, it will make us more careful how we fall into the like danger again. The loss of our innocence and the favour of God will teach us to set a higher value on them, and make us take greater care not to let them slip, when they have once been recovered by us. To this we may add another reason, that such a state of mortality and subjection to the inconveniences of the present life is the best way to shew the vanity of all human things, and to turn our thoughts and affections from all those allurements of this present world, which are apt to engross them, and carry us away from the pursuit of virtue. The short enjoyment we can have of them, and the mixture of unhappiness that cleaves to all of them, is the best instruction to us what esteem they ought to be held in, and takes off much from the strength of their solicitations. And farther, our mortality may serve as a standing memorial of God's wrath and indignation against Sin, renewed and impressed upon us every day in the most awful and striking manner, and under the
most

most awakening circumstances that can well be devised.

Quest. Has the sin of our first parent no farther effect upon us, than barely to subject us to death and sorrow? Is not our nature corrupted, and rendered utterly incapable of any thing that is good, as well as continually prone to all that is evil; so that we are become guilty in the eyes of God, and liable to his eternal wrath? To say the very least, are not our powers weakened, and we in a much worse condition, with regard to our improvement in virtue and the favour of God, than Adam was before his fall?

Ans. To say, that God has given us a nature necessarily prone to evil, and utterly incapable of any thing that is good, and that in consequence of it he will esteem us guilty, or punish us for doing what we could not possibly have avoided, is an assertion too shocking to be maintained. God himself would then be chargeable with our sin, by having sent us into the world under circumstances, in which it would have been unavoidable. If we say mankind has helps provided, to correct and amend this his nature, his guilt will then consist, not in the faultiness of his nature, but in the neglect of those means which were put into his power. And as to our powers now,
whether

whether they are better or worse than those of Adam were before his fall, the Scripture does no where expressly declare. Admitting however, what some have without sufficient proof advanced, That, upon his wilful transgression, his animal frame became distempered and disturbed, his blood and spirits disordered and inflamed, so that his understanding was clouded, his passions raised, and his will drawn into irrational compliances; and that this, by natural generation, was conveyed from him to all his posterity: Admitting all this, yet we are not by this necessitated, for then it would be no sin, but only solicited to evil; and it is not the solicitation itself, however powerful it may be, that is sinful, but our compliance with it. It may be more difficult indeed, for a man thus solicited to stand his ground; but may not God prove and exercise his creatures with what trials and difficulties he thinks fit? And as our present is a state of greater advantages, it may possibly be right for us to undergo greater trials.

Quest. What then shall we think of those texts of scripture, which seem to affirm the contrary?—such as these,—
‘we are born in sin’ — *‘we are by nature children of wrath’* — *‘by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners’* — *‘they*
B
that

*that are in the flesh cannot please God;—
 'I know that in my flesh dwelleth no good
 thing';* with others of the like import.

Answ. We may observe, that it is no unusual thing amongst all writers, both sacred and profane, to put the cause for the effect, or to call the thing produced by the name of that which produced it. Thus, for instance, evil and corrupt actions are called by the name of the Flesh, because they spring from it; as on the other hand virtuous and good habits are signified by the name of the Spirit, because effected in us by him. In like manner, when we are said to be *born in sin*, or to be *made sinners*, it will be meant, that we are subjected to mortality, which was the consequence of sin, and by it introduced into the world. By our being *children of wrath* will be signified our being liable to the consequence of God's wrath against the transgression of Adam, which, as we have seen before, was Death. Thus also, *those that are in the flesh*, that is, those who are carnally minded, who have their affections set on and engaged by sensual things, *cannot please*, or be acceptable to, God. So likewise St. Paul, speaking in the person of the sinner, says, *I know that in my flesh*, that is, in my fleshly appetites, *dwelleth no good thing; for though to will is present with me,*

me, though my reason approves that which is good, yet, being under the dominion of carnal appetites, how to perform it I find not.

Quest. But does it not seem inconsistent, if not with the Justice, yet with the Goodness of God, to have put men under such difficulties, and to have thrown such impediments, in their way to Virtue? If God is really desirous that men should be virtuous and good, why has he not made it easy for them to become so? Why has he put them to such severe trials? Why exposed them to temptations so likely to prevail over them, and seduce them from it.

Ans. It would be a sufficient reply to this question to say, that God, who made them, best knows what trials are proper for them, and how the minds of his imperfect creatures will be most effectually wrought upon, and trained up to Virtue and perfection. Some trials however are necessary; for the mind, like the body, is to be brought to it's strength and vigour by exercise, and combating with difficulties. — Trials likewise are requisite for men's understanding themselves, and being able to form some judgment of their own strength, — a thing not readily to be attained to.

If men have too good an opinion of themselves, it will make them presume hastily and undertake rashly. On the other hand, if they are too diffident of their abilities, they will be apt to decline as timorously those things which they should pursue. Now there is no instructor in this case like experience. The best way to judge how they are likely to behave under future trials, is to consider how they have succeeded in what are past.—It is also useful, that men should know one another, as well as themselves: Their safety in dealings, in friendships, and in all the converse of life, requires it. Temptations then are the means of discovering the latent good or evil of our hearts, and shewing how we would act on any the like occasions. They are useful to fix our Characters, and to instruct others whether it be safe to put any trust or confidence in us or not.—Temptations are likewise of great service, in order to stop the mouths, and silence the complaints of wicked and ungodly men; who would be apt to insinuate to others, or perhaps to believe themselves, that God had not dealt righteously or equitably by them, were they not distinguished by trials, and the iniquity of their hearts made manifest by their actions.

Quest.

Quest. You have shewn me the state into which sin hath brought mankind; let me ask you farther, Has God provided no remedy — has he opened no way for our escape, but consigned us over, without possibility of relief, and left us hopeless and forlorn under the dominion of death?

Ans. God did not intend to leave us hopeless in that condition: He knew, from the beginning, that mankind, by forfeiting their innocence, would stand in need of mercy and forgiveness; and therefore out of his infinite loving-kindness contrived a way for our recovery by means of his Son. Some have thought this to have been done by Christ's righteousness being imputed or made over to us, and accepted instead of our's; but were this the case, we should have no need of any of our own; nor would that be true which St. Paul tells us — that '*without holiness*' [not another's but his own] *no man shall see the Lord.*' The true state of the case seems to be this, that as God saw it proper for the discouragement of Sin, that Death should be the consequence even of one single act, not only to the sinner himself, but also to all his posterity; so did it seem no less proper for the encouragement of Virtue, that he should reverse that sentence in favour of that eminent

nent instance of it exhibited by his Son, in offering up his life in obedience to the will of his Father, and for the happiness and welfare of mankind. Accordingly, we find God hath honoured him with a power of raising the dead, and put into his hands *the keys of death and hell*, that is, the grave; so that *as by man death came into the world, by man came also the resurrection of the dead; and as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Christ has not only delivered us from death, but has also abolished the former covenant, and procured for us a milder and better in it's room; more extensive in it's influence, and consisting of more gentle and easy conditions; for it not only frees us from that one offence, which brought Death into the world, but also from all those, which through a long course of time we have personally committed, and which, tho' there was no express law threatening them with death, yet could not but be odious in the sight of God. Thus the Apostle tells us, that *'the judgment was by one [offence] to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences to justification.'* And whereas, by the former covenant, Sin was absolutely punishable with death; in this, provision is made for infirmities, and we are

are allowed pardon for all those faults which we sincerely repent of and amend.

Quest. Before I ask you any thing about the terms of this second Covenant, let me enquire of you, Why did God insist upon the life of an innocent person,—or why indeed demand any satisfaction at all, for that which he might have forgiven without it?

Ans. This is a question which will best be answered by saying, that we are not admitted into the secret counsels of God;—that as mankind had offended, and laid themselves open to punishment, God might grant them pardon and remission upon what terms, and in what manner he thought best and fittest;—that it is probable, he has been as gracious to them as his wisdom and the ends of his government would permit him to be; but then what effect his forgiving sin barely upon the repentance of the sinner, without any other satisfaction or punishment annexed to it, would have had upon mankind, or on all his imperfect rational creatures in general, is out of our power to say. Possibly they might have taken occasion, from such indulgence, to have hardened their hearts, and not sufficiently to have revered those laws, the breach of which was so easily to be repaired. It is no unusual

unusual thing to see wicked men make a bad use of clemency and forbearance, and to grow worse from kind and gentle treatment. It may be requisite therefore, for any thing we know, in order to keep his rational creatures within the bounds of decency, and make them more careful how they offend, for God to convince them, that his laws are not to be broken with impunity. — It shews likewise to men of all capacities, in the plainest manner, the great aversion which God bears to sin, and how terrible is likely to be the punishment of all those who are finally impenitent; seeing that for the forgiveness even of penitent sinners, he has thought fit to require no less satisfaction than the death of his Son,

We may also see from hence, that the satisfaction which God has required is not by way of an equivalent, or such as he could not reasonably have refused; as is the case of one man's paying a debt for another, where all the thanks are due, not to him who is paid, but only to him who pays it: But it is such a punishment annexed to sin, as the wisdom of God has seen requisite, to preserve in us a due veneration for his laws, and to keep us more steady to the conditions of that new and better covenant which is offered unto us,

Quest.

Quest. Let me now ask you, what are the conditions which Christ has required of us under this new and better covenant?

Answ. They are three,——The first is REPENTANCE, or a change and amendment of our corrupt minds and manners.—The second is FAITH, or a belief in Christ, that he is a messenger sent from God, to reveal his will to us.——The third is OBEEDIENCE, or a faithful performance of whatsoever he hath commanded us to do.——The two first of these, namely Repentance of all his former sins, and a stedfast Belief of all that he can discover to be the doctrine of Jesus Christ, are required of every one who is admitted into, or professeth himself to have any share or interest in, this second covenant, as far as he is then capable, or as soon as he shall be capable of them. And to these we must add the third, namely actual Obedience, after we are admitted into it, if we intend to be partakers of those rewards, which are there offered and held forth to us,

Quest. What is it that we are to understand by the first of these conditions, or what is included in a true and sincere repentance?

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Answ.

Ans. In order to a real and unfeigned repentance, it is necessary that we make a true and right judgment of our actions and behaviour. Until we know what is faulty in our conduct, we cannot tell what is requisite to be amended; or until we understand what is right and commendable, we shall not know how to set about it.——But then, it is not enough for a man to know good or evil, unless such knowledge be accompanied with a change of his will and affections. They are properties of the mind, as well as the understanding; nor can the mind be said to be thoroughly changed and amended, till the affections are so likewise.——This right judgment of our actions therefore, must be accompanied with a love and desire of what is good, as well as with a hatred and detestation of what is evil. The mind must learn to choose the good, and to eschew the evil, before it can be said to have repented as it ought to do.

Nor are the bare love of virtue and hatred of vice sufficient to constitute repentance. We may love the one, not for its own sake, but because it promotes or administers to temporal advantage: And we may hate the other, not because it is truly odious, but because it is attended with some worldly inconvenience.

inconvenience. True repentance then requires, that we form in ourselves a right judgment of what is good and evil—that we be sufficiently inclined to the former, or averse from the latter; and this, not for any sinister ends, but only out of regard to their own worth or demerit; that we love Virtue, as being in itself commendable and worthy; and hate Vice, as something in it's own nature odious and detestable.

Quest. But how is a man to come by this love of virtue and hatred of sin? And to what height are they to rise in him, before his repentance can be said to be complete?

Ans. This love of virtue and hatred of vice is a temper of mind that is to be gain'd by degrees. The change from sin to virtue is not to be wrought suddenly, and at once; but must be a work of time. A man, by frequently calling into his mind, and setting before himself, the turpitude and mischief of sin—how contrary it is to his obligations towards his best benefactor; how productive of mischief to himself and others; and on the other hand, by often contemplating the excellencies and advantage of virtue, will at last gain to himself a proper love of the one, and hatred of the other; which will encrease, the oftener and more atten-

tively he uses himself to consider them.— When this his hatred to sin is risen to such a height as to be greater than his love of it; when it grows into a habit, and is in general sufficient to keep him from all known and deliberate acts, then may his repentance be accounted acceptable and sincere; tho' still it may be far enough from being perfect. It is the duty of all persons to be constantly improving, and growing up more and more towards this perfection, and to be continually increasing this habit. The farther we advance in it, the more acceptable are we unto God, and the less in danger of falling back again under the dominion of evil.

Quest. But what are we to think of sorrow for what we have done, and a resolution of doing better for the future? Is not this, (as many are of opinion) to be accounted repentance?

Answ. No.—A man may be sorry for what he has done, (as I observed before concerning the hatred of sin) not on account of the evil of it, but of certain temporal inconveniences which he finds to follow from it. But this sorrow is not so much because he has done amiss; it is not a sorrow for sin; but because he is likely to suffer for it, which every evil man will at
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one time or other find to his cost.—His resolution of doing better may likewise be founded upon the same principle.

Neither sorrow for what is past then, nor resolution of amendment are alone to be accounted Repentance. Where true repentance is indeed, they will always be found with it. If we have in us such a hatred for sin and love of goodness, as I have before described, we shall be heartily vexed with ourselves, whenever we perceive that we have done amiss; and shall sincerely resolve to avoid doing so for the future. So that though both these things will necessarily accompany a true repentance, yet they are not repentance itself; because they may be, and often are, found without it.

Quest. Is repentance confined to sins committed before our admission into this second covenant; or is it available for such sins as are committed after our reception into it?

Answ. Repentance is not confined to such sins only as are committed before our admission, but is also available for those faults, which we have fallen into afterwards. Those indeed, who, after their admission into this better covenant, fall into any great or habitual

habitual vices, are more inexcusable. Their guilt is greater for having sinned against such superior knowledge and advantages; their hearts will be apt to become more hardened, and their repentance will be more difficult: Nevertheless such persons are not wholly cut off from the benefit of repentance. St. Paul exhorteth the Corinthians to comfort the incestuous person, whom he had delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord. He likewise complains of many other grievous sinners, because they had not repented; which argues, that upon their repentance they would be forgiven. St. James also tells us, that *he who converteth an erring brother shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.* And our Saviour himself, by commanding us to forgive one another until seventy times seven, teaches us to hope for proportionable compassion at the hands of God.

Quest. What are we to understand by the second condition required of us in this new covenant; which, you told me, is FAITH?

Answ. By Faith is meant our belief that Jesus Christ is a messenger sent from God, to declare his will to mankind; and of consequence, that whatsoever he has delivered

vered unto us, either by himself, or by others sufficiently commissioned by him for that purpose, is true and to be obeyed by us.

Quest. As God has endowed man with Reason, and made him capable of examining and judging, it is not to be supposed, that he intended we should take these things upon trust, without sufficient arguments for our conviction. What proofs therefore are there, to convince us that Christ was a messenger sent from God?

Ans. The proofs are many and various. The powerful and miraculous works which he performed are a strong evidence; works manifestly exceeding the reach of all human abilities:—such as, raising the dead to life, — inveterate and hopeless diseases cured by a word, or by the touch of his garment, — the gift of tongues communicated to the illiterate, and even winds and seas growing still at his command. Consider farther, that all these things were performed, not in a time of darkness and ignorance, but in an inquisitive and sagacious age, — before the face of friends and enemies, — not once or twice only, but through a course of forty years; — at a time too when miracles had ceased among the Jews, who would therefore the more narrowly inspect

spect them,—and on persons and occasions, not such as he chose out for himself, but such as accidentally offered themselves unto him; insomuch that even the Jews themselves could not deny the reality of his works, but endeavoured to give them another turn, and attributed them to the assistance of the devil; not considering, that if Satan were divided against himself, his kingdom could not stand. So that our Saviour might very well appeal to his works for the evidence of his Mission, *The same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me; and again, Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

To these we may likewise add those Prophecies, which were designed to mark out and characterize the Messiah; all which do remarkably agree, and are fulfilled in Christ. —He was to be a Prophet like unto Moses; *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me.* But Ezra, who survived the last of the Prophets, says, *There arose not a Prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do.*—He was to introduce a new and more perfect dispensation; *A new Law, says the Prophet, shall go out of Sion;* and this was to be binding both
both

both to Jews and Gentiles; *I will give thee for a Light unto the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my Salvation unto the ends of the earth.* —He was to bring good tidings of Peace and Salvation, —to make his Soul an offering for Sin, and to justify many by bearing their iniquities. —He was to make intercession for the transgressors, —to make a reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting Righteousness. And all this was to be done within the term of four hundred and ninety years, before the destruction of Jerusalem, and during the continuance of the second Temple; All which Prophecies were exactly fulfilled in Christ, and in no other person whatsoever. The Prophecies and Predictions which Christ himself delivered, concerning things that were to happen afterwards, are a very strong proof of his divine authority. He foretold very plainly his own death, and the circumstances attending it. He engaged to rise again the third day, and to send down the holy Ghost upon his disciples. He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people; and that this should happen before that generation passed away, —which so remarkably answered his prediction. He spake of the great success of his Gospel, and shewed what would happen to several of his disciples. Now to bespeak

a state of sufferings and very great calamities to himself and followers,—to engage to disappoint his adversaries by rising from the dead, and, in spite of all the powers of lust and passion, to convert an idolatrous generation to the worship of the true God, is a proposal too fair to be made by an Impostor, and would be the likeliest means to prove him such.

It will add some strength to this reasoning, if we consider also the wonderful agreement between the persons, the incidents and institutions of the old and new Testament,—the striking analogy and similitude between the whole Jewish Economy and the Christian Dispensation,—how strongly, in numberless instances, the one is pointed out and prefigured by the other with the greatest preciseness imaginable. This seems a thing hardly possible to be the effect of chance, but must proceed from wise contrivance and design.

Quest. I acknowledge, that these miracles and prophecies, which you have mentioned concerning Christ, if they be true, are a sufficient proof of his Mission; but how shall I be assured that they are so? We must rely chiefly on the testimony of Scripture for the truth of them; but how shall I be assured

assured that the Scriptures themselves, in which these things are contained, are genuine and to be relied on, and not the production of after ages, written with a design to impose upon the world?

Ans. It will be sufficient to convince you of the truth and credibility of the scriptures, to shew—that they were written at the time and by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed;—that the relation contained in them has all the marks of truth that can reasonably be desired; and that it is highly improbable to think they have been altered or corrupted since.——That they were written by those to whom they are usually ascribed we can little doubt, as we find them acknowledged even by the immediate successors of the Apostles,—as they have had the concurrent testimony of our forefathers, and have been transmitted down to us, in a continued succession, to this very time. And if this has been thought sufficient evidence for all other writings, why should it not be accounted such for these? The great care also and scrupulousness, which was used in the early ages of Christianity in compiling the Canon of scripture, will be a farther testimony of it, since, as we are assured by the history of those times, nothing was admitted into it, but what,

upon the fullest examination and the clearest evidence, appeared to be authentic.

The relation contained in them has also all the marks of truth that can reasonably be desired. It was given us by men sufficiently qualified,—such as were eye and ear-witnesses of what they affirm, and therefore could not possibly be deceived. They were moreover plain and illiterate; capable, 'tis true, of relating what they heard and saw, but entirely unfit for framing a story so uniform and consistent in all its parts; or for devising a system of morals so excellent in itself, or so worthy of God to give, as that of the Gospel is on all hands allowed to be. Nor was the doctrine delivered any way calculated for their worldly profit or advantage. They reaped from it neither gain nor credit; on the contrary, they underwent the greatest sufferings, and severest persecutions in defence of it; and at last sealed their testimony with their blood. Nor was it at all fitted to make it's way in the world; it might rather be expected, as it took men off from all the pleasures and allurements of the present life, that it would not be received without very forcible and convincing evidence of it's truth and certainty. Nay, it would have been no easy matter for them to have imposed

posed a false story upon the world had they design'd and attempted it; for where a man treats of things, not only within his own knowledge, but also of those to whom he writes, as is the case of the authors of the Gospel history, it must be in the power of many to detect and confute them.

Nor is it easy to conceive how these writings could have been adulterated and corrupted in after-times. They were translated very early into almost all languages, and dispersed into very distant nations and countries. The first Christians held them as a sacred treasure, and chose to undergo the worst of torments, rather than give them up to their enemies to be destroyed or corrupted.—They were constantly read in their assemblies,—quoted and appealed to, in every age since that time, by persons of different sects and parties; many of whom have transcribed the most material passages, and some even large portions of them into their own writings: so that they have been transmitted down to us, with continual evidence both of friends and enemies, greater far than any other writings whatsoever; and a general corruption of them must have been impossible.

Quest. You have convinced me, from the
miracles

miracles and prophecies recorded in scripture, that Christ is a messenger sent from God. You have shewn also, that the scriptures, in which these things are contained, are writings worthy to be believed. I have still a farther question to ask you concerning miracles : May not a man be imposed upon by appearances ? May not that seem miraculous to some which proceeds only from natural causes, or which perhaps may be the effect of art and contrivance ?

Ans. Many of Christ's miracles were of such a kind as hardly to admit of a possibility of men's being deceived in them ; such as raising the dead, curing inveterate diseases, and the like. But supposing such a thing were possible, yet the Providence of God is concern'd to secure all faithful and good men, in matters of so great importance, against unavoidable deception. God will not suffer an impostor to work a miracle in his name, without affording his faithful servants an opportunity of discovering and detecting it. Our security therefore in this case consists, not so much in ourselves and our own sagacity, as in the Providence of God ; who would himself be the author of sin, did he suffer good men to be drawn into Error, by such proofs as it was impossible for them to gainsay.—Even supposing

supposing the miracles wrought against the truth to be real ones, the same answer would serve. God would find some way to overthrow them, unless the cause which they are to support were *apparently evil*; for in that case, nothing could prove it to be a message that came from God.

Quest. Let me ask you yet another question—Does it not seem an argument against all Revelation, that there is no need of it to persons endowed with reason? Is not their own reason a sufficient guide for them in their duty? Was it not given to them by their Maker for this very purpose? And can we suppose he would give them an unsafe, or an insufficient guide?

Ans. However sufficient Reason might have been at first, while men continued in a state of innocence; yet, after they had transgressed, there were other things necessary, which Reason could not, and Revelation only could, direct them to. If natural reason only could teach us that God was placable, and would, upon true repentance, be reconciled to his offending creatures, could it teach them also, what methods were wisest and best to bring them to that repentance?—Could it teach them what was fittest to improve and secure it in them
after

it was begun?—Could it furnish them with such motives as were likely to make the deepest and most lasting impressions upon their minds, such as, eternal life,—the assistance of God's holy spirit, to help their weak and imperfect endeavours,—with many others contained in the Gospel?—Or let Reason be ever so sufficient for their direction, did it reform the world, and bring them out of the evil in which they were involved?—Did not the wisest ages that the world ever saw, notwithstanding this help, continue still in darkness and error? And what reason have we to think, that we should have succeeded better, had not God in mercy afforded us the light of Revelation, to guide us in the paths of duty and the road to happiness?—Reason is likewise the province but of very few—it is a very laborious method of coming at knowledge;—it requires great parts and sagacity, and an accurate discernment of things;—qualifications which fall not to the lot of many. And after all, men, even of the greatest reason and most accurate penetration, have differed much from one another; and that even in some very plain as well as important matters: Whereas faith lies level to all capacities. It is an easier and more concise method of coming at truth; more fitted to all conditions, and all understandings of mankind,

mankind.——Or let things be ever so well made out by Reason, still faith affords an additional evidence; and it must surely be some comfort, to a man of any tolerable modesty, to find his own reasonings backed and confirm'd by the testimony of Revelation.

Quest. But if faith be a thing so greatly advantageous, how comes it to pass that the Gospel, which is the object of faith, was not sooner divulged and made known in the world? Why was it deferr'd for so great a number of years, and came not as soon as mankind had offended?

Ans. We should consider, that there was a promise of these good things, even from the beginning, as soon as man had fallen, tho' not so clearly revealed and made out as afterwards in the Gospel. We should consider also, that all ages and persons are not alike fitted for the reception of God's benefits. A truth, at some times, in some places, and under some circumstances, may be better received than at others,——may spread more universally, and be of much longer duration. So the Gospel of Christ, manifested in one age, might be more generally beneficial; whereas in another it might have had but small extent, or short continuance.

nuance. It is probable therefore, that God chose that time which would best answer the purpose; and deferr'd it to such a season as was most proper for it, and in which he saw it would be of most advantage to the world in general. And in the mean time he required of mankind no more, than what he had given them abilities to perform; nor made them answerable for what they had not received.

Quest. Will you inform me farther, how it comes to pass that FAITH is commanded, as we every where in Scripture find it to be, and enforced on us as our duty? If faith is an assent of our understanding, which must necessarily be given or withheld according as the evidence appears to it, how is it in our power, either to afford or deny it? or why are we commended or blamed for either the one or the other?

Answ. Though faith be an assent of the understanding, which must necessarily judge according as things appear to it, yet may vice or prejudice, or passion, or various other causes, blind it or represent things to it different from what they are, and so cause it to judge amiss concerning them. Nothing is more usual, than for such things so to engross the man, as to make him negligent
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or inattentive in examining the evidence, so that if he judges he must judge in the dark; or to give him partial views, so that his determinations will be wrong. Therefore, in order to judge aright, it will be requisite that a man bring with him great sincerity and integrity of mind;—that he have nourish'd up in himself a love of truth and virtue; and that he have brought his passions and appetites under due order and government. These things will otherwise be a bias upon his mind and understanding, and draw him away from the perception of the truth. And as these are things much in his own power, and what he ought to do, so may that faith, which is the consequence of his doing so, be justly required at his hands, and be esteemed as a duty incumbent on him.

Quest. What are the chief of those doctrines, which the Christian Religion recommends to our faith, or requires of us to be believed?

Ans. One of the first things which we are required to believe is the Being of a God.—He that cometh unto God must believe that he is, *i. e.* that there is such a Being. And indeed, it is no small confirmation of this opinion, that the wisest

and most learned, in all ages and nations of the world, however divided by interest, custom, &c. after the strictest search, and the very best use they could make of their reasoning faculties, have universally agreed in this truth, and given it as the result of all their enquiries, that there is one God, the Creator and Maker of the universe, and of all things therein.

When we turn our eyes also upon the things about us, and contemplate the frame and order of the universe, can we reasonably conclude, that these things had no origin, or that they are effects without a cause? —Whence then had they their beginning? Enquire of the atheist, and he will send you, for the production of these things, to FATE—to CHANCE,—to NATURE.—But what is FATE?—Nothing but a mere unalterable necessity. And if things exist by such a necessity, then they must be unchangeable both in themselves and their circumstances; for that which is necessary can admit of no change, but requires a constant and unvaried uniformity: Whereas this is not the case of any thing in this world.—Matter itself is perpetually fluctuating, and all the forms and combinations of it are varying continually.

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And as there is too little constancy and regularity to ascribe these things to Fate ; so, on the other hand, there is too much to impute them to CHANCE, which is never constant, but always fluctuating and unsettled. Regularity and order are things inconsistent with it's character. If Chance made the world, how comes it to pass, that, in so many thousands of years, it should not destroy it again ? Whence is it, that things have, for so long a time, continued unalter'd and uniform ? That the heavenly bodies should go on so constantly in their courses ; that day and night, summer and winter should so regularly succeed each other ? When we see such eminent marks of wisdom and contrivance, not only in the formation of our own bodies, but of every beast, bird, and insect ; nay, in the construction of every tree, herb, and flower ; how can we attribute these things to Chance, void as it is of all counsel and design, and not conclude them the works of forecast and knowledge ? We might as well think an elegant picture the effect of colours sprinkled on at random ; or a beautiful and convenient house to have been produced by the casual jumbling of all the materials into that form.

Again, What is NATURE ? The nature
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of any thing is no other than it's internal frame and constitution, or, in other words, the thing itself. To say then that any thing was made by nature, is to say that it was made by itself; than which nothing can be more unphilosophical and absurd. It is therefore reasonable to think, from the frame of this visible world, that there must be some divine artificer and framer of it, of wisdom and power sufficient for so important a task.

To these might be added many other arguments to prove this most interesting truth,——such as the prediction of future events, which nothing but a divine Omniscience could foresee, and nothing but a divine power fulfil.——The natural instinct also of animals——How artfully do some of them build their nests——how closely confine themselves to hatch their young, as if they knew the power of their own warmth? How do others provide food, and lay it up for winter? All these things are not to be accounted for by natural causes only, without recurring to a divine power, who directs their motions, and has impressed such instincts upon them. But let what has been said suffice for the confirmation of this important truth, which cannot

cannot be denied without the greatest obstinacy and perverseness of mind.

Quest. What sort of a Being are we to acknowledge God to be, or of what excellencies and perfections are we to believe him possess'd?

Ans. The supreme Being must be possess'd of every perfection whatsoever. We see here among the creatures several excellencies, such as understanding, liberty, wisdom, power, &c. Now as nothing can give or communicate to another that which it has not itself, for that would be to make the effect more perfect than the cause, so must the supreme Being be possess'd of all those perfections, of which he is the author and giver. The creature may indeed have many imperfections, such as are not in the Creator; but can have no perfections which do not come from him. — And as there can be nothing prior or superior to this supreme Being, (who, as I have already shewn, is the first cause of all things,) which can limit or set bounds to these his perfections; so must he possess them in an unlimited degree, and be himself infinitely perfect.

Moreover, "Right and Reason," saith an excellent writer, "are the things which
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“ will direct and influence the Will of every
 “ intelligent Agent, where nothing irre-
 “ gular does interpose. Whenever this
 “ Right and Reason are not made the rule
 “ of action, it can only be, either because
 “ the agent is ignorant of what is right,
 “ or wants abilities to pursue it, or else is
 “ knowingly and willingly diverted from it
 “ by the hope of some good, or the fear
 “ of some evil. But as none of these can
 “ possibly have any place in God ;—As
 “ having all knowledge, 'tis impossible he
 “ can be deceived in judging what is right
 “ and fitting ;—Having no want of any
 “ thing, his Will cannot possibly be in-
 “ fluenced by any wrong affection ;—
 “ and having no dependence on any, his
 “ power cannot be limited by any supe-
 “ rior strength ; his actions must always be
 “ directed by Right and Reason only, and
 “ he will act according to infinite Justice,
 “ Goodness and Truth, and all other mo-
 “ ral perfections whatsoever.” [Clarke's
Attributes, page 115.

Quest. What is the next truth, which the Christian religion requires of us to believe ?

Ans. That as God at first created the world, so does he also direct and govern it.

it.——Let us but consider his Wisdom, and we shall see this very plainly. Can we suppose him to have produced a world, such as this is, carrying in it so many marks of wisdom and art;—can we with any reason imagine him to have laid out such eminent skill and contrivance, without proposing to himself any end or design? And if he has any design, and has not made all things for nought, can we suppose that he will not be careful to see it executed? To conceive the contrary is to make infinite wisdom act in a manner inconsistent with any wisdom at all; and to ascribe to the great Creator of all things less prudence than we generally use in the management of our own affairs.——

Or let us look on his Goodness; neither will this permit him to sit unconcern'd in the management of the world. Goodness is an active principle, that will not lie idle. He who refuses to do good, when he has it in his power, is not really possess'd of this principle. Can God therefore, when he has made innumerable Beings capable of happiness and misery, be supposed to give them up, without care or concern, to all the evils which may chance to happen to them? Can he thus desert his offspring in their infancy, and shew less compassion towards them, than even earthly parents usually do to their children?

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Quest.

Quest. In what manner does God administer this his government in the world ?

Ans. To all material and inanimate Beings God has given certain fixed and stated laws, and endued them with intrinsic powers, according to which they constantly and necessarily act ; by which means the present constitution of things is upheld. They become instruments of fulfilling his Will, and are made subservient to his most beneficial purposes. Nay, were not things thus constant in their operations, we could make no tolerable judgment of events, or have any foresight of things ; but must be uncertain and doubtful in our most important concerns, unwilling to undertake any thing for ourselves, and unable to give directions to others.—And things, acting always according to these laws, are rightly said to be under his government, because these laws and powers themselves are the effect of his will, and no other than what he has appointed and approves of.

Quest. Do things in the material world go on constantly according to these stated laws, which God has appointed for them, and never vary from them ? or has not God reserved to himself a power to suspend or over-rule them, whenever he sees fit to interfere,

terfere, and by an immediate influence to alter the course of events, and make it different from what it would otherwise have been?

Answ. Some are of opinion, that as God foreknew all future exigencies, so he establish'd such general laws in the material world, as he knew would be answerable to them, and sufficient for every end and purpose that should happen, without any need of his particular interposition.—But, not to mention that this is taking a thing for granted, of which they can bring no proof; it is doubtful whether there could be originally any such fix'd and stated laws or necessary course of things, as would be sufficient to answer the infinitely various and uncertain passions, designs and pursuits of free Agents. And if this cannot be, then, whenever the government of the world may be more wisely conducted, or where such an interposition would answer more valuable purposes than could be provided for without it, we have great reason to think that God will not be wanting, even in particular cases; but by suspending, over-ruling, or joining these laws together, will bring about what is most reasonable to be done.—This also we may be assured of, that on many great and important occasions, such as to support the credit of his Pro-

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phets, or to give testimony to his Word, &c. God has particularly interfered, and, by suspending or altering these laws of nature, has brought about his designs.

We may observe farther, that, as it is reasonable to expect there should be sufficient constancy in things to convince us that they do not come to pass by accident; so likewise may we think that there are some exceptions, to prove that they are not the effect of fate or necessity; thus destroying those two opposite arguments, which are brought against Providence from Chance and Destiny.

Quest. But how does God govern rational and intelligent Beings? These seem to be under no such necessity of acting, but rather to have a power over, and to be Lords of, their own actions.

Answ. God has not put intelligent Beings under the same necessity as the material part of the creation; but has endued them with liberty, that is, has given them a power to do, or to forbear, all such things as are within the sphere of their activity. But then this liberty is to be under the guidance and direction of their Reason, and of those commands which God has enjoined

joined, or shall at any time see good to deliver unto them.

Quest. You told me just now, that in the natural or material world, God, upon some special occasions, has probably reserved to himself a power to interfere, by suspending or over-ruling those laws which he has established in it. Let me now enquire of you how it is in the moral world. Does God leave his intelligent creatures entirely to that liberty, which he has given them; or has he not here also reserved to himself a power of interposing, so as to restrain or change their purposes, when he perceives that they would prove inconsistent with his designs, or when they tend to bring disorder and confusion into his government?

Answ. 'Tis true, God has a power to suspend or alter those designs of men, which he does not approve; but then this is done in such a manner as not to take away or destroy their liberty, but is perfectly consistent with it. He influences or changes their will, not by any physical impulse, but by moral motives; such as do not necessitate, but only persuade; and though they prevail upon him and influence his conduct, still the man acts willingly and freely, and is not forced or compelled in what

what he does.—This is often done by natural causes, acting according to those fixed and stated laws which God has appointed for them; for even small incidents have often very great influence on the minds and resolutions of men, and are the occasions of remarkable events. Even the falling of a shower may happen to change our minds, and divert us from a journey, which otherwise might have proved exceedingly detrimental to us.—Or it may be effected by a casual word or action, spoken or done by others in our presence; or by thoughts suggested to, or concealed from us by God himself or by other spiritual beings. By all, or any of these ways God may change the minds or influence the actions of men, without destroying their liberty, when otherwise they would prove contrary to his designs. He may prevent our running ourselves into danger,—may suggest to us methods for our security and defence,—may change the minds of our enemies towards us, or cause them to direct their mischief another way. Or by various other methods, impossible for us to describe, he may provide for the prosperity and security of his servants, whenever he sees fit that they should be prosperous and happy.

Quest.

Quest. But if God can do this, how comes it to pass that there is so much mischief in the world? The miseries of life have been an old complaint, which seems indeed too justly founded. They meet us in every stage, every condition of it. We find none who are compleatly happy, and but few who are even easy and contented. Or if evils are sometimes necessary in life, why do they fall to the lot of the righteous? Why are the wicked seen so prosperous and happy?—why surrounded with pomp and plenty, while the good are frequently subjected to misfortunes and calamities of various kinds, some of them so great as to move pity and compassion in the hardest heart? Does not this seem to bear hard on Providence? or how can it be reconciled with the Justice and Goodness of a wise and righteous Governor?

Ans. In answer to your question, I shall consider the different kinds of Evil in the world. Some evils there are, that we are apt to complain of, which are nothing more than the just punishment of our offences. It is very reasonable, for the preservation of order and decency, and to check the growth of vice and immorality in the world, that there should be some discouragement annexed to the violation of
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our duty,—something which may prevent the total extirpation of virtue and goodness from the creation. And of this sort may be accounted not only those evils which are the immediate appointment of God himself, but those also which are the natural effects and consequence of our own sins;—such as the pains and diseases which follow a course of intemperance;—the poverty and contempt which attend profuseness and extravagance. Of this sort also are those evils, which by our imprudence and want of discretion, or by our false judgment of things, we often bring upon ourselves. And to these may be added all those which are the consequences of wrong and misplaced affections; which render men unhappy by disappointment, and oftentimes still more unhappy by success. Is there any room to accuse Providence for these things, which a man has thus brought upon himself,—or to complain, if, for the mis-use of those powers and faculties, which were sufficient to have prevented it, God should suffer him to eat the fruit of his own ways, and to be filled with his own devices?

Other Evils there are, which are very proper for the exercise, improvement and confirmation of our virtue. Virtue is not the natural growth of the mind; but we
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are sent into this world, that by trial and exercise we may be trained up to it. How should we learn patience and resignation under afflictions, were there no evils to assault us? To what a low degree would our pity and compassion rise, were we never by experience made sensible of those misfortunes which demand it? Strength of mind, like strength of body, is to be obtained by combating with difficulties. Thus the Son of Sirach tells us, *Wisdom at first walketh with a man by crooked ways, and tormenteth him with her discipline, until she have tried his soul, and proved him with her judgments; then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and shew him her secrets.* And if evils are thus necessary for our improvement, who is there, even among the best, that does not stand in need of them? *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin.* — Or, when it becomes necessary to exemplify these difficult virtues to the world, it will then be needful to afflict the righteous, seeing they are the only persons who are capable of doing it. Nor will it be thought grievous by them, as it is for the advancement of Virtue, which they esteem above every other convenience whatsoever.

Other Evils besides these there may be,
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the reasons for which cannot be so easily assigned. How often, for instance, do the interests of different men clash and interfere, so that the promoting of the one must be at the expence of the other, no less deserving perhaps than himself? How often, when countries are overwhelmed by inundations, or cities buried in ruins; when provinces are ravaged by wars, or desolated by famine or pestilence, have the righteous suffered with the wicked? But though we cannot assign one, is there therefore no reason for these things? may they not, for any thing we know, have a natural tendency, after many intermediate consequences which we cannot foresee, to promote our interest, if not in this, yet in some future state? And can we charge that upon Providence, as an Evil, which may be an instrument of Good? We cannot say it is not, unless we could unravel the whole scheme of God's government, and see how much each particular circumstance contributed to the whole.— Or suppose these evils to have no natural tendency to the particular good of those on whom they fall, but to be necessary for the general welfare only; yet is not the general good preferable to that of any particular? And is not the interest of every individual included in, and dependent upon, that of the whole?— Or shall it be esteemed matter of
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of complaint against God, that he hath put into our hands an opportunity of acting a part, great, generous, and useful?— that he hath chosen us out as good soldiers, for an important and difficult enterprize, and given us power to purchase for ourselves that reward of glory, honour and immortality, with which he has promised that all, who suffer here according to his will, shall be crowned hereafter?

We may also consider, that even good men are not always so careful and industrious to hinder the growth of vice as they might, and indeed ought to be; and therefore have the less cause to complain, when they partake in those evils, which they would not be at the pains to prevent.—Evils therefore may be defended under a wise and just government, nor will it be any reasonable objection, that they are sometimes distributed even to the righteous themselves.

And as to the prosperity of the wicked,— God may raise them up for those purposes which he sees fit to execute by them, and make use of them as his scourge in the world.— Or he may grant them prosperity as a reward of some good actions, which they have done.— We should remember also, that God afflicts none willingly, nor

grieves the children of men; but, where there is no good reason to the contrary, causeth his Sun to shine, and his rain to descend, that is, bestows his benefits on the evil as well as the good; and that when punishment becomes necessary, their former prosperity may serve to heighten it, and make it more severely felt.

To all this we may add, that we are improper judges of persons, who are good and who are evil. It is very difficult to distinguish between realities and appearances; and unless we could look into a man's inmost thoughts and intentions, it will be impossible to discern true virtue and perfection from those false colours which are the resemblances of them. For the heart of man is a hidden thing, and who can know it? None but He to whom all things are naked and open to his view. He indeed that made the eye shall see, and he that made the ear shall hear, and He that formed the heart of man shall consider the thoughts and intentions thereof; but for Man to do this is a task highly impossible.—Nor are we less ignorant of Things,—what is good and what is evil. There are many circumstances of life, which we may account misfortunes,—many accidents befall us that we are apt to reckon evils, which are many times the direct

rect contrary; and though at present they seem harsh and disagreeable, may lead us to things useful and advantageous: and he must have been but an inaccurate observer, whose own life will not furnish him with sufficient instances;—who has not often had occasion to change his opinion of things, and found those to be happy in their consequences, which at first he accounted amongst the misfortunes of his life; and that, what we are apt to call the good things of this world, frequently prove only instruments of vengeance in the hands of Him who knows how to apply them to that purpose. Thus may we see that God governeth the world, and the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men. *That God is King, the earth may rejoice, and the multitude of the Isles may be glad thereof.*

Quest. What other doctrines does the scripture recommend to our belief?

Answ. Next to the being and sovereignty of God, we are taught to believe in his Son JESUS CHRIST. The Son of God is a term used in Scripture in various senses. In the first place, all his rational creatures are called Sons of God, as having received from him life and being. Thus it is that Adam is said to be the Son of God; and

thus Job represents the Angels as the sons of God, shouting for joy at the laying of the foundations of the world. Again, all good Christians are in a farther sense termed the sons of God, as having received from him the principle of spiritual life, and the promise of an eternal life hereafter. But Christ is more peculiarly said to be his Son. — He is said to be so on account of his being conceived by the holy Ghost in a miraculous manner, as the angel declares to the blessed virgin, *The holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* — He is likewise said to be so from God's having raised him from the dead: Thus, says St. Paul, *God hath fulfilled his promise to us in that he hath raised up Jesus again, as it is written in the second Psalm, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.* And thus it is that we are told, he was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. Thus also is he said to be the first born among many brethren. — He is farther said to be the son of God, from that power and authority with which he was invested by the Father. *Is it not written in the Law, I have said ye are Gods? If he call them Gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot*

cannot be broken; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? And again, He is set down on the right hand of the majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?—LASTLY, he is said to be the Son of God, as having been from the beginning with the Father, before the world was—being the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, even the image of the invisible God,---most truly and properly a divine person;---God manifested in the flesh, and in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily:---The Son of God in such a manner as no other person can be said to be, called therefore his *only Son*.—To give a more particular explication of this relation it were in vain to attempt; for *who*, as the Prophet says, *can declare his generation?*

Quest. What is the relation which this Son of God stands in to us?

Ans. The relation which he bears to us is signified by his name Christ, or anointed. For the understanding of which we must

consider, that there were several offices among the Jews, to which persons were consecrated or set apart, by this ceremony of anointing them with oil. — One of them was the office of High-priest, *Thou shalt put upon Aaron, saith God, the holy garments, and anoint him, that he may minister before me in the priest's office.* Thus also, *The priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation.* — And not only the High-priest, but Prophets also were set apart for their office by the same ceremony; thus the Lord commanded Elijah, saying, *Elisha the son of Shaphat shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.* — And thus also were persons appointed to the regal power; so Samuel tells Saul, *The Lord hath sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel.* Again, the Lord commanded the same Samuel to anoint David, saying, *Arise, anoint him, for this is he, that is, he whom I design for the royal dignity.* By Jesus being the Christ then, or the Anointed, will be signified his being appointed to each of these offices. — He is our High-priest, who has offered himself a sacrifice for sins. *Christ, we are told, being an High-priest of good things to come, neither by the blood of goats nor calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the*
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holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. — He is our Prophet, Instructor or Guide, as he is a messenger sent from God to make known and declare to us more fully his Will; according to what Esaias saith, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. — So also he is our Lord and Governor. God hath given him to be head over all things to the Church. — He hath given him all power in heaven and earth, and put all things in subjection under his feet. — He shall reign over the house of Israel for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. — His name is king of kings, and Lord of Lords.

Quest. What are we to believe farther concerning the Son of God?

Ans. We are to believe that this divine person was conceived by the influence of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. — That he was really and truly MAN. — That the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. — That he took part of flesh and blood, and was in all things made like unto his brethren. — That, after a painful life of sufferings foretold by the Prophets, he was at last crucified and put to death under Pontius Pilate the Roman governor

governor of Judea.—That he was actually dead, his body laid in the sepulchre, and his soul descended into Hell, that is, not into the place of punishment for condemned persons, but into the invisible state of departed spirits, as that word, which is here translated Hell, does constantly signify in Scripture.

Quest. Is there any thing farther delivered in holy writ concerning him, which it is requisite for us to believe?

Answ. Yes. We are assured that he rose again from the dead on the third day, to fulfil those prophecies which he had given to his disciples. *Destroy this temple,* said he, *and in three days I will raise it up again.*—And, *As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*—He told his disciples also, that he must suffer many things of the Elders and chief Priests and Scribes, and be killed, and rise again the third day.—And the time of his continuance in the grave was so short, that he might not see corruption, as David had prophesied concerning him; *Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy one to see corruption.*

Quest.

Quest. What proof have we that Christ was really raised from the dead, according to the prophecies before-mentioned?

Ans. As all facts, which are not manifested to us immediately by our senses, must be supported by the testimony of others, to whom they were thus manifest; so Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, has given us the most convincing evidence that a thing of this nature is capable of. — He assures them, that this doctrine was not grounded upon bare and common hearsay, without knowing the first authors of it; but he refers them by name to such persons as had seen him after his resurrection, and were witnesses of it: — Persons who knew him perfectly well, and therefore could not be deceived in him. Had any one attempted to counterfeit his person, they who went in and out with Jesus from the beginning,—who were his constant associates, his daily companions, must certainly have discovered the cheat and detected the impostor. To such witnesses does the Apostle refer them—to Cephas—to James,—to all the Apostles,—who saw him after his passion, not only by one single glimpse or interview, but they ate, they drank with him, and he appeared to them by the space of forty days, discoursing with them

them of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Quest. But are not all these men who were concern'd in interest to support this story? May we not well suppose, that favour and affection to their departed master, —their unwillingness to hear his name vilified, and his memory defaced,—or the shame of being themselves accounted weak and credulous, had knit them together in this invention of his Resurrection?

Ans. If these were the only persons appealed to, there might be more reason for this objection; but he refers them to others, and tells them he was seen in Galilee of above five hundred brethren at once;—men not dead, and whose testimony could be gathered only from what they had delivered to others; but he gives them to understand, that they might be informed of it by those very men themselves, *of whom*, he says, *the greater part remain unto this present, though some are fallen asleep.* These were persons, who, if it were a falshood, were not so much interested in it as the former, and therefore might be believed, if the others were not. Is it probable, that, among all these there should not be so much as one man of common honesty,
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—not one whose conscience could prevail upon him to discover the cheat, which would quickly have spoiled the testimony of all the rest; but that they should go out of the world, persisting to the last in a falsehood, and without dread of the divine vengeance ready to take hold of them for their deceit.—This he likewise strengthens by another argument taken from the inconveniences and miseries, which the propagators of this doctrine underwent in this life,—the most severe that could be devised. Is it reasonable to think that men, who knew these things to be false, would suffer so much in vindication of them;—would undergo infamy, imprisonment, the spoiling of their goods, and even death itself, in defence of a falsehood, from which they could reap neither credit nor advantage? They must needs be sensible of this at their first entrance upon this work. The protection of Heaven they could not expect for the furtherance of a lie, or to countenance them in deceit. The religion they taught was too contrary to the corrupted passions and inclinations of men, to gain them any favour from them. — Or could we suppose them to have been so blinded at first as not to have foreseen these things, yet is it likely that none should be found, who, when experience had convinced them
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of their mistake, would be glad to discover the cheat, and accept better usage? Besides, Is it likely that the lives of the first preachers of this doctrine would have been so strict and abstemious, as we find them to have been,—so entirely agreeable to what they preached; so that their profession did not speak one thing and their practice another? Virtue needs not to flee to falsehood for support.——Nay could they have kept up to all the strictest and most rigorous precepts of Christianity, if they had not been supported by an inward assurance of the truth of what they delivered? Do not men, who stedfastly believe these things, find it hard enough to curb their inclinations and bridle their passions? And could these men, if they knew all to be false, receive such influence from them as to be able to do it? Must they not have been of a different make from the rest of mankind? Or is it not much more probable, according as the Apostle argues, that they would have been inclined rather to eat and drink, if to-morrow they were to die?

To these might be added the many miracles and wondrous works, which the assertors of this truth were enabled to work in his name, in confirmation of their testimony;---with many other proofs: but let what has been already said suffice.

Quest.

Quest. These arguments, 'tis true, might have been sufficient to convince the Corinthians, if duly offered to them; since they had the opportunity of examining and searching into the truth: But how are they proper for our conviction now, who have no such power of trying and enquiring into them?

Ans. That these arguments were really offered to the Corinthians, can admit of no doubt from any one who believes the genuineness of the scriptures; a thing which I have before endeavoured to prove, and need not here repeat. Nor can it be supposed, that the Apostle would lay down such, as upon proper inquiry would have been found false and inconclusive. If therefore the Corinthians, who could, and without doubt did examine into them, acquiesced in these his reasonings, and were convinced by them, as we are on all hands assured they did, we at this time have no sufficient reason to doubt them.

Quest. What became of Christ after his resurrection from the dead?

Ans. After having risen again from the dead, he ascended up into heaven, as our high priest, to make intercession for us.
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He entered not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: And there is exalted to the highest honour and dignity, and constituted Head of the Church; *Angels, Authorities and Powers being made subject unto him.*

Quest. What other truths are there, which the scriptures require of us to believe?

Answ. The scriptures teach us, that besides the Father and the Son, there is a third Being concurring in the work of our Salvation, who is termed the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit. He is there represented, not as a quality or power only, as some have imagined, but as a real Being or Person.—He is joined in the form of Baptism with the Father and the Son, who are confessedly both of them persons.—He is said to perform such operations as are not well applicable to a power or quality; such as to make intercession to God for us;—to speak not of himself, but what he shall hear only;—to search all things, even the hidden things of God.—He is in scripture called by the name of God. Our Saviour, being conceived by the holy Ghost,
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is said to have been the Son of God. Ananias, in having lied to the holy Spirit, is said to have lied unto God.---He has also divine attributes ascribed unto him. *Who through the eternal spirit,* says St. Paul, *offered himself to God.* And we are told, that *the Spirit is truth.*

As the Scripture has no where explained the proceſſion of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, and as this is a thing above the reach of our natural reason, I shall not here attempt to do it, or presume to be wise above what is written.

Quest. What are the offices and functions of the holy Spirit.?

Answ. His offices and functions are principally these; to enlighten the understanding—and to rectify the Will. This, in the Apostolic times at the beginning of Christianity, he did in a miraculous manner.—He enlightened their minds, not by dictating every word or syllable which they either taught or wrote; but, leaving them to their own faculties, he then only interposed, when without his assistance they would have fallen into error, or done things hurtful or inconvenient. Helikewise confirmed their authority by the miraculous

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works, which he empowered them to do; but when that authority was sufficiently established, there was then no farther occasion for such miracles, and they accordingly ceased in the Church.—And as he enlightened their understandings, so also he rectified their Wills in as surprizing a manner. Sacred records give us a large as well as wonderful account of the sudden and entire change which the Spirit made in the dispositions and manners of those whom it enlightened, transforming, almost in an instant, their habits of vice into the ready practice of every virtue. Nor can this so sudden a change be imputed to the force of mere rational conviction. It is impossible for reason to root out at once inveterate habits of vice, and introduce immediately those of virtue. This must be a work of time, and is to be done by degrees. So that when we find such an amazing alteration of corrupted nature, we can ascribe it to nothing less than the powerful operation of the Spirit. And this so wonderful operation might be very useful at first, to convince mankind of the reality of such a help provided for them, and to support the professors of the Gospel under those extraordinary trials, with which in those times it was attended; but is not to be expected now, when the belief of the one is so thoroughly

thoroughly established, and the violence of the other so happily abated.

Quest. But have we not a promise made us, that the Spirit shall abide with us for ever? If this his miraculous influence over us be now ceased, after what manner does he still continue with us? Or what is the assistance which good men are at this time to expect from him?

Ans. He still assists us, both by enlightening our minds, and rectifying our Wills; but then this is not done in a miraculous, but in a more ordinary manner. He now enlightens our minds by means of the Gospel, which being a sufficient rule of faith, containing all that is necessary for us to believe, we have less reason to expect illumination in any such superabundant manner; as would otherwise have been needful. Where this Gospel is dark and intricate to us, there, if we faithfully ask his assistance, and are not wanting to ourselves, he will reveal even this unto us, and we shall know of the doctrine, as far as the necessity of our case requires. And as to the rectifying of our Wills, this is not done now in so forcible a manner as formerly; but by bringing to our remembrance those Gospel truths, which otherwise, by the

weakness of our memory or by the force of worldly avocations, might happen to be forgotten, and lose their influence; or by keeping out of our way such temptations as he sees would have an improper effect upon us. The gifts of the Spirit are now in the nature of assistances only. He influences our Will by moral motives, such as persuade, but do not necessitate, such as help our natural faculties, but do not force them. And though without such helps we should not perhaps have done the action, yet are we entirely free in the doing of it.

Quest. You told me just now, that Christ was promoted to be head of the Church; will you let me know what I am to understand by the Church of Christ?

Answ. The word Church is in Scripture taken in several senses. First, it is taken for all good men in general, who in the several ages of the world, and under the several dispensations, have expected, believed and rendered themselves capable of inheriting the redemption purchased by Christ.—The word Church is also used for all those who, from the first coming of Christ until his second coming again, shall have made profession of Christianity, and declared themselves his disciples.—The word
Church

Church is sometimes taken in a more restrained sense still, and signifies that part of Christ's Church, which at any particular time is present and visible upon Earth: And this is the sense in which the word is most commonly used. This Church of Christ, though it consists of many members, yet is but one; according as the Apostle teaches, *that we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* And as every particular person is a part of the Church to which he belongs, so is every particular Church a part of the catholic or universal Church of Christ; so that there is but one fold under one shepherd.

Quest. How is a man admitted into, or made a member of this Church?

Ans. By Baptism.—As men are accustomed to make use of some form or ceremony, when they admit persons into any office, dignity, or privilege; so are they admitted into Christ's Church by Baptism, in which they covenant to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and to believe and obey those laws which he has appointed for them.—That likewise which makes a man a member of this Church is sufficient to continue him so, unless by some other means he forfeits this privilege.

lege. Whilst a man acknowledges Christ, and professes to believe and obey his Gospel, he may ordinarily continue to be a member of his church, though he make not that profession good in his life and actions. Our Saviour compares his Church to a field, in which there are both wheat and tares,—to a net full of fishes, both good and bad,—to a floor, on which are both corn and chaff. And as the members of any particular church singly, so may that church itself, or the whole assembly of which it is composed, become corrupt, without forfeiting the privilege of belonging to the universal church of Christ. For though they may have among them false doctrines or unlawful forms of worship, such as may justify us in separating from them, as is the case of the Church of Rome; yet as long as they retain the essentials of Christianity, they are not to be excluded from the Church of Christ. Thus the corrupt state of the Churches of Smyrna and Sardis, in the Revelation, did not immediately unchurch them; for we find them called by the name of Churches notwithstanding, and they are only warned to reform their conduct and amend. So that a Church may be a true Church in one sense, that is, a real one, though it be not so in another, that is, have

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not it's doctrines and practices true and uncorrupted,

Quest. I would fain be satisfied, whether a man is at liberty to depart from the doctrines and ceremonies of any Church, whenever he himself judges them contrary to Godliness? If his own private judgment is to be his Rule, may he not often judge amiss? Or will not pride, curiosity, interest, or want of care, be apt too frequently to mislead him?

Answ. A man ought to pay great reverence to the opinions of the Church, and not hastily to depart from them; since it is very natural to think, that a number of good men, met together with sincere and unprejudiced minds, after careful and diligent endeavours, and fervent prayers to Almighty God for the assistance of his holy Spirit, are much more likely to find the truth than any single person can be. A man therefore should consider their arguments over and over again, should weigh them well, and, if need be, consult with some men of learning and knowledge in that persuasion, before he ventures to reject their determination. But if, when he has done all this, and every thing else that reasonably can be done, he still receives no satisfaction, but

thinks truth to lie on the other side, he must then believe and act according as his own judgment directs him, and be determined as things appear to him, not as they appear to another. Why are arguments offered to us? Why are reason and scripture afforded us? Why are good men commanded to pray that their eyes may be opened, that they may discern the truth, if they are not to follow what appears to them to be so, but must be guided by the judgment of another, which, after the best examination they can make of it, they cannot but think to be erroneous? But when men, knowingly and willingly, through pride, prejudice or interest, or any other sinister motives, are led to espouse erroneous opinions, or fall into them through any great or criminal neglect, then it is that they are guilty of the sin of Heresy.

And as to Rites and Ceremonies—it is wisely ordained that the Church should have the appointing of them, provided they be not contrary to the Laws of God, but such as tend to promote order, decency and edification in their assemblies. The Apostles themselves could not so well provide for all the future exigencies of the Church. Things that appear decent and comely in one age or country, may have a different aspect in another. A strict and
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severe discipline may be necessary at one season, which at another time would not be born, but tend to throw all into confusion. Different men will make different judgments concerning the fitness and expediency of many things, and it is necessary there should be some authority to determine between them. The hours for public prayer, which in one place may be highly convenient, may yet be as inconvenient in another. Even the form of our devotions, were it left at large and not prescribed, would be nothing but disorder. One would be apt to have his Psalm, another his prayer, another his thanksgiving; so that instead of decency and order, there would be nothing but irregularity and confusion in the house of God. The rules therefore, which the Apostles have laid down concerning these things, are in general terms. *Let all things be done decently and in order. Set in order the things that are wanting;* with many others. But the particular way and method of doing this they leave to the discretion of the Church, to be adjusted according as times and occasions shall require. All Christians therefore are obliged to yield obedience to such laws, when enjoined by the Church to which they belong. We are commanded to study the peace and unity of the Church, not to make any unnecessary

necessary divisions in it. But where men, upon the best and fullest examination they can make, are persuaded there is any thing sinful in the terms which any Church requires, there, if they cannot be dispensed with, they are at liberty to separate from it. But when needlessly, or without that due examination, which ought to be given to a thing of such moment and concern, or for any other worldly end, men separate and withdraw themselves from the Church, there they are justly accounted guilty of the Sin of Schism,

Quest. But is it not lawful for men to withdraw themselves when they think they can be better edified elsewhere? Is not our improvement in virtue the main business of our lives? And are we not to go where we are of opinion it will be most effectually promoted?

Answ. I readily agree with you in your notion of edification, which, in the Scripture sense, is our improvement in virtue; but let us see whether this may be best done by our separating from, or by our continuance in, the Church. — The means, which almost all Churches use for the improvement of their members, are Prayer and Preaching. As for the prayers
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of any Church, when they are composed by a society of good men, duly assembled for that purpose, and have been frequently and carefully revised by them, do they not offer fairer for our improvement, than such as are composed by any single person only? When they contain in them petitions for every virtue proper for our Christian State, and thanksgivings to Almighty God for all the benefits which we have received from him, and this in a clear intelligible language, what more is necessary to make any form useful? The sincerity and attention, with which we offer them up, must be our own work, and is much preferable to that warmth of temper with which they are accompanied in some men,—which is merely constitutional, and not so conducive to our improvement in holiness. If there should be thought to be in them some small defects, (as what human composition is entirely perfect) are these sufficient to justify that bitterness and want of charity, with which church-divisions are usually attended?—And as for preaching, it is of two sorts,—either to inform the understanding,—or to move the affections. Now though any deliberate act, which is to be resolved on and put in practice immediately, may best be promoted by the latter, yet as our passions and affections are
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apt to flag and lose their influence, any continued course of action, which is constantly and habitually to be exerted by us (as virtue is) will be best promoted and augmented by the other.—It will be hard likewise to assign a reason why men as learned, and as capable of doing this, should not be found amongst one party, as amongst the other. Or supposing there should be found divided from us some man of more extraordinary abilities, yet as our improvement is owing more to the assistance of God's Spirit, than to any external administrations; may not he, who continues in the Church and consults the peace of it, with much greater assurance expect the blessing of God, than one, who, by separating from it, discourages an honest and worthy Pastor, and raises feuds and animosities in the Church, which is generally the case where there are divisions,

Quest. Are there any other truths which the Christian religion requires of us to believe?

Answ. Yes.—It teaches us, that, at the end of the world, all men shall rise again in their bodies, and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.—That the Soul, in it's own nature immortal, should be
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be capable of surviving the body, and receiving in some future state the rewards or punishments due to it's actions in this life, is a truth clearly deducible from Reason, and which has often been made out by most undeniable arguments: but that the Body should rise again and be re-united to it, is what mere Reason cannot teach, but we must be assured of it from Revelation only. Accordingly we are told, that *all that are in the grave shall hear his voice and come forth.*—Again, *since by Man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*—So again, *Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.*—And again, *The Sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and the grave deliver up the dead that are in them.*—Nor is this doctrine, though it cannot be proved from Reason, by any means inconsistent with it. Cannot he, who at first created the parts of our body and joined them together, re-collect and join them together again, after they have been disunited and dispersed? Cannot he, who at first connected the Soul and Body, with the same ease bring them together again, after they have been separated?

Quest. Your notion of the Resurrection seems

seems to be, That the Soul is to be joined to the same body that was buried; but how will this be possible? Has it not often happened, that, through famine, necessity and various other causes, men have been reduced to feed on each other, by which means the parts of one body have been turned into nourishment; and some of them become parts of another? and these, though indeed they are but few, yet hinder it from being raised strictly the same.

Answ. If, in order to constitute any thing the same, it must consist of every individual particle of which it was at first composed, then no composition of matter can for any continuance be called the same; there being no combinations of it which are not almost continually suffering either diminution or increase.—The body of a Man is altered from what it was when he was a Child—or when emaciated with sickness, from what it was when in health; and yet all allow him to be the same man still. It is not necessary therefore, in order to denominate our body the same, that it should retain every particular and most minute part, of which it was at any time composed; for then, as I before observed, nothing in this world could continue long the same: but it is sufficient that the principal

cipal parts of it remain, by which it may be known and distinguished from every other.

Quest. You have shewn me how I am to believe the resurrection of the same body; but is our body to be raised with the same properties, as well as the same parts?

Ans. St. Paul tells us, that *flesh and blood*, that is, bodies such as we have now, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. Hence we must conclude, that there will be some alteration made in them. And this, he shews, is no improbable thing; for as the same matter is formed into different kinds of flesh, one of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds; so these bodies of our's may be raised with different properties from what they now possess.—*It is sown*, for instance, *in dishonour*, that is, there are many imperfections, many deformities cleaving to it; but it shall be *raised in glory*,—all these shall be set right, and *he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*, which he shewed in his transfiguration on the mount, when *his face did shine as the Sun, and his raiment was white as the light*; or in his appearance to St. Paul, when the light of his presence was *above the bright-*
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ness of the Sun. Such probably shall the bodies of the righteous be,—so shall they shine in the kingdom of their father; but as for the wicked, they possibly may rise in the same dishonour they were sown in,—with all their imperfections, with all their deformities about them.—*It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.* All the sickness and infirmities, which are often the companions of our youth, but the almost inseparable attendants of our old age, shall be done away. All weariness and faintness shall cease,—the body shall be no more a clog or incumbrance, but perfectly at the command of the active spirit which inhabits it. The bodies of the wicked may be far otherwise; as those of the righteous are fitted to receive the greatest happiness, so may those of the other be fitted for the greatest misery.—*It is moreover sown a natural body,* or as the word properly means, an animal body, subject to hunger and thirst, liable to corruption, and which will of itself go to decay: but it shall be *raised a spiritual body*, such as shall not need the recruits of meat and drink, but shall be, like a Spirit, constituted for immortality. It shall be in some measure like the body of Christ, which is gone before, which *dieth no more, neither hath death any more dominion over him.* This too may
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be the lot of the wicked,—they shall be immortal and endure for ever; but this immortality shall be, on the one hand, a foundation of joy for the righteous, on the other, of misery for the wicked. They shall find their body raised up not subject to decay, when they shall wish it were so.—But farther,—As the bodies of the righteous shall be raised thus glorious and honourable, so shall some be more so than others. There shall be in them different degrees of perfection, *as one star differeth from another star in glory.* So among the wicked also it is likely there will be different degrees of imperfection. Those who have grown old in wickedness;—who have refused all offers of salvation and mercy,—who have been deaf to all the dictates of the holy Spirit secretly admonishing them, and working in their hearts, shall rise again cloathed with the greatest degree of deformity.

Quest. You mentioned just now, as consequent to the Resurrection, our being brought into Judgment. What proofs are there of such a judgment? or how shall we be assured that all men shall be called to an account for the actions of this life?

Ans. This is a truth, not only founded
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in natural reason, but confirmed to us also by Revelation. When we consider how mischievous sin and wickedness are in the world,—how contrary to the peace and order of God's government, we cannot imagine but that a wise and righteous Governor, as he is, will take such measures and establish such laws, as are proper to check the growth of them, and prevent such evils in his creation. And is it likely, that after having laid down such laws, he should not take such methods as are most proper to secure our obedience to them? And yet how little obedience could we expect from men, who were neither to be rewarded nor punished for their behaviour, or who were to give no account of their conduct. Would not self-love and self-interest,—would not passion and appetite prove too strong for all other motives, and prevail over those persons, who had nothing to hope or nothing to fear, as the consequence of their actions?

Quest. That rewards and punishments are highly proper to secure obedience, must readily be granted; but is not this actually done in this life by the natural consequences of Virtue and Vice? Do not violent and irregular passions, tend to destroy the peace and tranquility of our mind? Is
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not the reflection on our ill-conduct accompanied with disapprobation and contempt of ourselves? And can that mind be happy, which disapproves and condemns itself?—Does not Vice also bring on us many outward evils?—Intemperance destroys our health,—luxury our fortunes,—fraud our credit. Every departure from reason tends to bring with it it's own punishment. It will therefore be no light chastisement, for God to leave men to the consequences of their own actions,—to permit them *to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices*;—Virtue on the other hand tends to the advantage of mankind, and furnishes them with nobler and more durable pleasures than can arise from the most unbounded gratifications of sense and appetite.—Since then it is the tendency of vice to bring with it it's own punishment, and of virtue it's own reward, has not God made a sufficient provision for obedience to his laws, without subjecting men to any after-reckoning?

Answ. 'Tis true indeed that vice generally tends to punish, and virtue to reward itself, and that, if their natural consequences were constantly and regularly to take place, it might in fact be so; but this is not always the case.---Where men are

gratified in their passions, their disquiet is lessened, if not quite taken away. It is disappointment that causes bitterness, and that does not always and immediately happen. Wicked men do but seldom reflect; ---nay they may proceed so far as to harden themselves, and almost wholly to stifle the voice of conscience, and therefore feel no compunction for their deeds. And the more wicked they become, the less will they feel of this natural punishment.--- The outward inconveniences, which vice tends to bring upon them, may be oftentimes evaded by wicked men, and that by means of their becoming more wicked still. Even those that do happen to them are not always suited to their demerits. The man who is drawn into intemperance by inadvertency, surprize, or with much averfeness, suffers the same natural consequences, and is as much punished as one that does it knowingly, deliberately and with full consent of the Will; whose sin, as it is aggravated by these means, deserves a greater degree of punishment than the other's.--- But are these circumstances fit to discourage the growth of vice in the world? Or will a just and wise Governor ever suffer this to be the final state of it.

And as evil men thus escape the inconveniences

veniences of vice, so do good men often miss of the advantages of virtue. The very practice of some virtues supposes a state of adversity; as when men exhibit examples of fortitude, patience or self-denial, and this frequently without any visible amends in this life: Nay even their virtue itself sometimes exposes them to misfortunes. Is this then a state fit to encourage the growth of virtue, in which the righteous miss of their reward, and the evil are frequently more prosperous than the good? Can we suppose God would suffer this to be the case, even in any single instance, without some after-reckoning to balance such manifest inequalities?

This testimony of Reason is still more amply confirmed to us by Revelation. *God, saith the Preacher, shall bring every work into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be evil.* Thus also the Apostle to the Hebrews, *It is appointed to men once to die and after Death the judgment.* I saw, says St. John, *the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books.*

Quest. As to the question, Who is to be Judge? together with the other circum-

stances and proceedings of that awful tribunal, I apprehend we can expect but little or no assistance from Reason; but what information we have about them, I suppose, must come entirely from Revelation.

Ans^r. You are very much in the right; and therefore from thence only I shall attempt to inform you. As to the person who is to be our Judge, he is no other than Jesus Christ the Son of God, who, as we have seen before, laid down his life to redeem us from the power of sin, and the wrath of his father. — *The Father judgeth no man; saith St. John, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.* — Again, *He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.* And, *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body.* So also, *As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.* As to the circumstances attending this judgment, we are told, that *the Heavens shall pass away*

away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up, and the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God; and the kings of the earth hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. So also, The Son of man shall come in his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the king say unto those on his right hand, come ye blessed children of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.

Quest. What is to be the consequence of this Judgment? or what effect will it have on mankind?

Answ. The consequences of this judgment will be the distributing to men those

different allotments of rewards and punishments, which their respective behaviour has entitled them to, in that eternal State which is to succeed the dissolution of this world.

Quest. What proof is there of such an eternal state, to succeed this?---seeing one of shorter duration would be sufficient to recompence men for what they have done or suffered here. What farther claim therefore can they have upon him, or why, and upon what grounds is it that you expect a longer continuance?

Answ. We have indeed no claim upon God for such a continuance in being; but y^t there are many reasons why we may expect it.—When we see a thing fitted for any purpose, as the eye for seeing or the ear for hearing, we naturally conclude that God created it for that intent. When we see some things constituted by nature to last longer than others, we reasonably gather, that it was the design of God, when he made them, that they should do so. Thus also, when we see the Soul in it's own nature incorruptible, and constituted for immortality, we cannot well help thinking, that God meant it should be immortal, and that it will continue so in that state to which he shall assign it after
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the close of this.—When we consider farther those good and noble faculties with which it is endowed, how capable they are of being improved to a still greater height, and of encreasing through every part of duration, can we reasonably imagine, that, when God hath created such a Being, fitted for so great and noble improvements, he will nevertheless cut it off in it's infant state, before it can bring them to any perfection?—When we consider also, that the longer good and virtuous Beings continue in existence, the fitter they are for it,---their advances in virtue will be greater,---they will be more and more capable of the enjoyment of God,—better fitted for his glory, and approach nearer to his moral excellencies; Can we suppose notwithstanding this, that God will cut them short in the midst of these their improvements,—that he will deny them the benefit of their good conduct and behaviour, and put an untimely end to their growing virtue and happiness? — This State, which from Reason is made thus probable, is from Scripture certain. *He that believeth in me, saith our Saviour, hath everlasting life,* Again---*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* Thus also the Apostle assures

assures us, that "the gift of God is eternal
" life thro' Jesus Christ our Lord ;" and
that "he became the author of eternal
" Salvation to all them that obey him."

Quest. What will be the state or condition
of mankind in the world to come ? of what
particulars does it consist, or what is it that
we are to expect to meet with there ?

Ans. Of what particulars that state will
consist, the scripture has not informed us.
" Now we see but as through a glass darkly,
" neither doth it yet appear what we shall be;
for " eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither
" have entered into the heart of man the
" things which God hath prepared for
" them that love him:" But in general the
Scripture represents this state of happiness
under the highest characters,—of "fulness
" of joy and pleasures for evermore,"—of
" a crown of glory," and " a kingdom that
" cannot be moved, where the righteous
" shall shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom
" of their father, where they shall hunger no
" more, neither shall the sun light on them,
" nor any heat;" for " God shall wipe away
" all tears from their eyes, and there shall
" be no more sorrow nor crying, neither shall
" there be any more pain, for the former
" things are passed away."

Quest.

Quest. You have hitherto mentioned only the state of the just; but what is to be the portion of wicked men in this future state, or of what will their punishment consist?

Ans. What the particulars of their punishment will consist of, we are not able to say. These punishments however are in general set forth to us under the most shocking images, and in the most dreadful colours that language can paint:—Of a place of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth—of a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone—of a bottomless pit, the smোক of whose torment ascendeth for ever and ever. It should be our care to avoid these things while we have time and opportunity to do so,—ere that season overtakes us in which no tears can prevail; in which no art can elude, no power can avert our sentence. Of this we may be fully assured, that both rewards and punishments shall be dealt out in weight and measure with the most exact justice, according to every man's desert; and that *in Righteousness God will judge the world, and the people with equity.*

Quest. The way to shun this terrible sentence, you have told me is OBEDIENCE, the third Condition requir'd of us by this new Covenant. Let me farther enquire of you,

you, what I am to understand by it, or what is included in this term of Obedience ?

Answ. Obedience is the subjection or conformity of our Will to the law of God. It consists not merely in outward actions ; for I may inadvertently, without any design, do a thing in it's own nature good or useful, —or involuntarily, as when I am forced to do it ; but neither of these can be properly called Obedience, because it is not done out of regard to the authority commanding it. On the contrary, if a man be necessarily and without his own fault hindred from doing any action, yet if his will was consenting, and he would have done it had he been at liberty, he will be esteemed obedient. Where the Will is fully bent, and proceeds not to action only for want of power, the person deserves the praise or blame belonging to such action, as much as if he did it ; because he did all that in him lay towards it, and it's not succeeding was owing to another cause.

Nor will it be sufficient for us to be thus obedient at some certain seasons or on some occasions only, unless we be constantly so. It is custom only that can make us expert and ready at any thing, and secures our practice of it. And till our obedience is thus secured

cured it will be but of little worth; we shall be as ready to disobey, as to obey his commandments.

But even this is not sufficient to make our obedience acceptable. It must be not only habitual, but universal. It must not extend to some one or few virtues only, but to all. The wilful neglect of any one is sufficient to destroy the merit of all the rest. That subject can never be said truly to reverence his Prince, who flights his authority in any instance. To do some duties and to disregard others is little better than mockery; it is to compound with God for the observance of half his law only,—to be his friend in some things, and his enemy in others. Whereas he himself hath assured us, that no man can serve two masters,—that we cannot bind ourselves both to God and Mammon.—But tho' we are obliged to yield obedience to every precept of God's law; yet our age, our circumstances, our opportunities in life may call for the exercise of some more than others, and consequently give us a greater improvement in them; our mind will be better affected, more closely united to them, and we ourselves shall practise them with greater readiness and alacrity.

Quest.

Quest. But where is this law to be found, or how are we to become acquainted with it? For the law must first be made known to us, before we can yield obedience to it. Nay, we must not only know the law, but understand it likewise, and perceive the meaning of it, otherwise it will be but a dead letter to us. Whither then are we to go for information and instruction?

Answ. God has delivered these his laws to us very fully, and set them in a plain and clear light before us in the Gospel, But though he has done so, yet will it require some application and industry in searching into, and making ourselves acquainted with, those writings in which they are contained; that we may have both them, and the motives by which they are enforced, continually in our memory, and habitually present to us, in order that all our actions may be influenced and guided by them.—Hence will be manifest the great blame which will justly lie upon all those who are careless and negligent in searching the scriptures, and using such other helps as are necessary for obtaining a knowledge of these things. And as God has made it so easy for them to do this, the greater undoubtedly will be the guilt of all such as suffer themselves to remain ignorant of them.— But then, many of these

these laws being delivered in general terms, we must in the particular application of them be directed by that Reason and natural Religion with which God has furnished and enlightened mankind.—The precise nature also of many of those virtues, which are commanded in Scripture, it supposes us to be acquainted with, from that natural law before-mentioned. Scripture therefore so frequently in these and many other cases referring us to the law of nature, it will farther become our duty, as far as we have opportunity, to search into that, and to improve our reason and intellectual faculties, in order to a right understanding of the scriptures, and securing ourselves from those errors, which may otherwise be apt to creep into our conduct.

Quest. Since this is a duty so necessary for all men to perform, how comes it to pass, that God has given them such different capacities and different opportunities for their improvement in it?

Some have quick and piercing understandings, whilst others are but slow and heavy in their researches. Some have leisure to make greater advances, whilst others are taken off and retarded in their progress by care for the subsistence of themselves
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and their dependants, or by attendance on the various duties and offices in life. Does not this seem as if God were partial to his creatures? If we are all children of the same father, why not alike partakers of his goodness? Why has he bestowed upon some ten talents, while he has given to others but one?

Ans^w. Though God is under no obligation in the disposal of his free gifts, but may distribute them as it pleaseth him, provided he requires not of any one more than he has given him abilities to perform, and though no one can have reason to complain, seeing even he who has received least has received more than he can claim: Yet as God is not an arbitrary Being, and dispenses not his favours capriciously, it must be supposed that he had some wise and good reasons for doing this.—Possibly those who receive less, may be more secure, and, if they will, may do better in a lower state, than if they had been placed in a higher. Great abilities, though they may be of great advantage, yet are not always rightly and profitably applied. An instance of this we have in the Angels, who, though greater in power and might than we are, yet kept not their first station, but with all their abilities succeeded

ceeded much worse than many who were placed below them.

By endowing mankind with different capacities and opportunities, he hath also put it into the power of some to exercise the virtue of benevolence, and to do good in their generation, by instructing, guiding and encouraging others of lower parts and attainments; to be *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame*. And to those who are thus assisted he has given occasion to exercise the virtues of humility, love and gratitude for these things; and hath made all the parts useful and beneficial to one another, and given them an opportunity of encreasing each other's happiness, as well as their own, and thus linked them together in society and affection by the prevailing band of mutual utility.

Quest. If obedience be so necessary a condition of salvation, what are we to think of all those passages of Scripture, which offer pardon and happiness upon other terms, such as faith, repentance, &c.? Thus, *Whosoever believeth in me, saith our Saviour, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.* Again, *whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* Thus also St. John the Baptist came *preaching repentance for the re-*

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mission of sins. And St. Peter gives this advice to his readers, *Repent, that your sins may be blotted out.*

Answ. Before I proceed to a more particular answer to your question, you would do well to observe, that this opinion of being saved by faith only, or repentance, or any thing separate from good works, is quite contrary to the design, and indeed to the expresse declaration of the Gospel, which tells us, that the end of Christ's coming was, *to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*; and which exhorts us, that, *denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*; which affirms also, that *we are all created in Christ Jesus, unto good works*; and that *not every one who saith, Lord, Lord, that is, who professeth to believe in him, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of his father which is in heaven.* As therefore this opinion is so contrary to the very design of the Gospel, we must look out for such an interpretation of those passages which you have produced, as is more consistent with it; and not interpret any expression in such a manner as to make these scriptures contradict each other.

By these expressions then of being saved by Faith and Repentance may be meant,
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men's being cleared or acquitted of the guilt of their past sins, or such as they had committed before their admission into Christianity. The two things, which the Apostles in their discourses constantly recommend to all those who were to be converted to the Christian religion, are, to repent of their former sins, and to believe in Jesus Christ. These, they assure them, were sufficient to save them from the guilt of their past sins; but they never tell them, that they are sufficient to acquit them from the guilt of any sins continued in, after their entrance on the Christian profession: On the contrary, they refer them to newness of life, and a constant course of obedience, in order to avoid the second death, and for the obtaining heaven and happiness hereafter.— Again, we may be said to be saved by Faith and Repentance, as they tend to destroy vice in us, and to establish moral virtue. True Christian obedience must have faith for its support, and is never to be found without it. We shall never obey Christ as our Lord and Master, unless we are first persuaded that he is such. We shall never submit to his gospel, unless we believe as true what he has there delivered to us. Faith is the root, the ground-work of all our service, without which it could never subsist; and therefore may well be said to save us, seeing

it produces in us that to which salvation is so inseparably annexed. The like may be said of Repentance, which, if it be true and sincere, consisting of a real hatred of sin and love of goodness, will and must exert itself in a course of obedience suitable to it; and may most properly be said to acquit us of those sins, of which we could not have been acquitted without it.—It is likewise no uncommon way of expression in Scripture, as well as in other authors, to call the effect by the name of the thing that caused it. Thus faith is often put for the consequence or effect of it, namely, fidelity or a steady course of obedience. So also repentance is put for that change of mind and manners, which is produced in us by it. It will be one and the same thing then, though couched under different terms, to say we are justified by faith or repentance, and by obedience.

Quest. But why hath God put us under any restraint at all? Why enacted laws for us so difficult to be observed? Might we not have lived full as happily, or rather more so, had he left us at liberty to do what was pleasant in our own eyes, and to follow what our inclinations prompted us to pursue? Must not every pleasure have it's peculiar appetite, in the gratification of which the
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very nature of pleasure consists? Why then has God given us a law, which requires of us to thwart our appetites, to practise mortification and self-denial, and do those things, which, instead of affording pleasure and happiness, only subject us to labour and sorrow?

Answ. Our inclination or taste for any thing, though frequently thought to be natural and therefore unalterable, are yet much more in our own power, than is generally apprehended, and depend in a great measure upon the light in which we view things, and the opinions which we entertain of them. Let a man but view any thing constantly or frequently in an agreeable or amiable light,—let him consider it as useful, pleasant, or advantageous, he will soon find his inclination to be excited, and his affections to be drawn towards it. Or let him view it, on the other hand, as noxious or disadvantageous, and it will soon grow disagreeable to him, and he will find himself to be averse from it. Men may by these means raise their fondness or distaste of any thing to almost as high a degree as they please, and thus make it become necessary to their happiness or productive of their misery. Nay, even things naturally disagreeable, and which cannot be totally ren-

dered otherwise, may by this method be made much less so, and we be more easily reconciled to them, by considering them as the way to something better. If then we take this method with ourselves, the Law of God will not be so burdensome as you seem to apprehend, but rather easy and agreeable; since our appetites, when once they are thus reformed, will covet those things which it commandeth; and to obey God's laws and gratify our own desires, will be one and the same thing. And though we may find some difficulty, before we can thus regulate our appetites and inclinations; yet, if this difficulty lead us to something that will amply recompense us for it, it will be no reasonable objection against God's laws, that they are difficult; nor is it to be complained of, that he has established them, since they lead us to greater pleasure and happiness than we could have attained to without them.

Quest. I grant you, that the thing, which upon the whole affords us the greatest pleasure and happiness, is undoubtedly to be chosen by us; and if this be the case of God's laws, he has most assuredly been our friend in establishing them. But will you inform me how this is to be made out, or why the pleasures and advantages of Religion

gion are to be esteemed the most excellent that human nature is capable of, and have so infinitely the advantage of all other enjoyments whatsoever? For I find men are not universally agreed in this point. Some give it on the side of ambition and sensuality, and would be content to resign up all the pleasures of piety and virtue, could they but be gratified in the others.

Ans. There may be, and I doubt not but there are, some who think thus; but shall their mistaken judgment be accounted the standard and measure of truth? Or shall we say, that their nature is not fitted for the enjoyment of greater and nobler pleasures, than what they covet, would they but cultivate and improve it as they ought to do? If we consider the pleasures of virtue, we shall find them suited to the dignity and improvement of our nature,—they gratify our best and noblest faculties,—they are what constitute the happiness of all superior Beings. The practice of virtue therefore exalts our nature, makes us like the higher and nobler part of the creation, and in some measure gives us a taste of their happiness and enjoyments. But what can other pleasures do for us? If they do not debase, they do not improve our nature. They have nothing to offer us beyond the

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present

present satisfaction, which they bring with them. Nay, they are very apt, those of the sensual kind especially, by captivating our affections, to take us off from all more important and advantageous pursuits, and enslave us wholly to themselves. So that, instead of advancing, they tend to degrade our nature, and bring us down to a nearer resemblance to the brutes, over whom we have no other superiority, but in being capable of more exalted enjoyments.—It may likewise be affirmed of virtuous pleasures, that they are such as, upon mature reflection, a man will find no just cause to repent of having pursued; but, on the contrary, he will have the satisfaction of being applauded for them by his own reason, and generally by that of others. To have performed his duty in every circumstance with the most conscious integrity; to have diligently cultivated in himself the noblest virtues and most valuable qualifications, will give him no compunction of mind, but, on the contrary, will be accompanied with delight and approbation. But from the enjoyments of sense, tho' regulated with the utmost prudence and moderation, what praise, what commendation can arise? what conscious approbation will they leave behind? The very best that can be said of them is, that they are lawful, or allowable; and

and if they have not been thus regulated, they leave such a sting behind them, as will envenom all future reflections. — It is also no small recommendation of these moral pleasures, that they are entirely in our own power, they can never be taken from us, nor can we be hindered in our enjoyment of them, unless by ourselves. They are subject to no accidents, no decay, but will always abide with us and be a comfort to us under all our afflictions. But can the like be said of any other pleasures, which decay with our senses,—which change with our appetites,—which wither and die away for want of fit opportunities to gratify, or the favour of others to cherish and uphold them?

Religion likewise, by calming and moderating our passions, and keeping them within the bounds of reason and decency, preserves all quiet within us, and gives us peace and tranquility: Whereas desires broken loose from under the dominion of reason are the foundation of every uneasiness. If ungratified they are clamorous and troublesome; if gratified they are only encreased and made more so; and when pursued to excess are usually, if not always, attended with pernicious consequences, and prove hurtful either to our mind, our
body,

body, our fortunes, or our reputation.

Moral pleasures will also be constantly encreasing upon our hands. While we continue in the service of virtue, every day will add to the satisfaction, without any possibility of coming to an end. There will always be something in reserve to reward our diligence, and to prevent our being cloyed or satiated. But is this the case with any other pleasures? They can be carried but to a certain height, and then have no more that they can give; and it may truly be said of them, *Hitherto shall ye come and no farther*. And when once they are come to their highest pitch, and have nothing farther to yield us, they then become flat and insipid; we soon grow weary of them, and begin at last to loathe them, as the full stomach does the honey-comb.

From what has been said it is manifest, that the pleasures which we reap from our obedience to God's laws are far superior to all others, which we are capable of enjoying here, and therefore abundantly sufficient to justify him in establishing them. When therefore at any time we find these laws to bear a little hard on our interests or pleasures, or to thwart our passions and appetites,

appetites, we should remember how much they are for our benefit and advantage ; and that though in the present case they may abridge us of some few satisfactions, they are nevertheless promoting our interest, and giving us much nobler enjoyments than what they take from us.

Quest. If obedience to these laws be so advantageous, how comes it to pass that men do not more steadily adhere to them ? They are usually ready enough to follow that which is for their interest. All seek for happiness ; and where both cannot be enjoyed, that which upon the whole they esteem to be the greatest, will certainly be preferred before the least. And if this be the case, how comes it to pass that they are so negligent in pursuing it ? It will signify little to say, they have mistaken and judged amiss concerning it. However this may be the case of some, yet there are others who judge rightly, and make a true estimate of things. Whence then is it that such persons deviate from it ; and that their principles and practice are so contradictory to each other ?

Ans. Though men judge right concerning their happiness, yet the thoughts and consideration of it being absent from
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their mind and unattended to, other thoughts take possession of it; sensual pleasures and meaner enjoyments crowd in and occupy it so strongly, as to keep all other considerations at a distance and out of view. So that that which is not in our mind or thoughts can have no influence on our actions, but we are guided and directed by what is there. Nor will this appear strange to any one who considers how much the mind is taken up by some objects, and how intensely it often fixes itself on them, so as to disregard other impressions, which else would have had very sensible effects upon it. The mind of man seems to be of such a make, that it cannot attentively consider more than one thing at once; this seems to fill the mind: and if it can admit of but one, then that which strikes most forcibly upon the mind will be apt to exclude, or perhaps to drive out all the rest, and so influence our actions accordingly.

Quest. But are not those things, which are of the greatest concern to us, likely to affect us most powerfully, and make the strongest impressions upon our mind? And may it not be expected that they should drive out all meaner considerations? And if so, how comes it to pass, that what we judge our truest happiness is not uppermost

most in our thoughts, and ready at hand to direct and influence our behaviour.

Ans. It will not appear altogether so strange, when we consider, that the pleasures of sense are early perceived,—that they are frequently repeated, and by that means gather strength and grow habitual to the mind, before we come to the use of reason, or are capable of understanding our greater happiness. Nay, even when we do so, it is not the bare understanding of it, that will do the work; but it will require much pains and diligence to give strength to the consideration of it, and make it habitual to the mind: And yet, till it comes to be so, there are little hopes of it's dispossessing the other. I may add farther, that the pleasure or pain of sensual objects are near at hand,—they even force themselves upon our observation, and will be taken notice of, and therefore solicit the mind more strongly than those of virtue, which are more remote, can do.

Quest. If sensual thoughts work thus powerfully upon the mind, and are so apt to exclude more useful considerations, how will it be possible for such considerations ever to gain admittance? And if they do not, how can they, as you observed before,
influence

influence our conduct, or how shall we be able to practise virtue and obedience? You will say perhaps, that let these thoughts solicit ever so strongly, we have still a power to deny them, and bring in others of a contrary nature in their room. But though we have such a power, yet is it by no means likely that we shall exert it. The difficulty of doing it is compared to things impossible in nature,—to the Ethiopian's changing his skin or the leopard his spots; how therefore shall we surmount this impediment to virtue.

Answ. To sustain us under this difficulty, we must have recourse to that assistance, which, as I told you before, is afforded to all good men by the holy Spirit of God. To shew how this is effected in us, let this one instance suffice instead of many others. Suppose, for example, the Spirit should send on us afflictions and calamities; these are sensible things and will be felt,—they strongly solicit our attention, and put us quickly on searching out the cause of them and looking for a remedy, which can assuredly be found only in the favour and friendship of God and a steady course of obedience to his commandments. Hence we begin to look upon this as our greatest concern. The thoughts of it occur frequently
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to our mind, and cherishing and indulging them we give them strength and power; till at length they gain the ascendant over us,—become habitually present to us, and are ready at all times to influence our conduct unto holiness.

The great business of our life then should be to take care what thoughts we entertain. If we give admittance to sensual thoughts, and indulge them in our mind, we shall soon find ourselves pleased with them, till at last they gather such strength in us, as it is hardly possible for us to overcome. Whereas, on the other hand, if we endeavour at all proper seasons to recal into our mind, and impress deeply on it, good and wise considerations, they will by degrees become habitual to us, and in the end gain such strength and power, as it will be almost impossible for any thing to overcome : And this seems to be the case of good Spirits and just men made perfect. And as this is our great and principal task in this life,—the way that is to lead us to virtue and happiness, let us take care that we be industrious to fulfil it, that so we may prepare our minds here, for a better and happier duration hereafter.

Quest. You have shewed me both what
obedience

obedience is and how I am to arrive at it ; But still upon reflection I cannot help perceiving in myself many errors and failings, and find that, after the most careful and diligent endeavours, my obedience is still but very imperfect. I shall be glad therefore to be informed, what imperfections are reconcileable with the terms of this second covenant, or what faults and defects in our conduct God will esteem consistent with a state of mercy and forgiveness.

Answ. In order to answer your question as plainly as I can, I shall consider Sin under these three circumstances, as being *knowingly*,—*wilfully*,—and *habitually* committed.

First, as to sins knowingly committed. Where there is an invincible ignorance, and men are destitute either of capacity or means for knowing better, there guilt can never be imputed. No wise Governor will blame his subjects for not conforming to a law which they never could have any knowledge of ; but such a plea must always be allowed sufficient to excuse them. There is still another ignorance which men are apt to fall into—from prejudice of education,—from credulity,—from forgetfulness or inadvertency,—from want of sufficient motives to examine, or helps to judge
rightly ;

rightly;—in short, an ignorance, which men fall into from no ill-meaning or perverse disposition of heart, but for want of such prudent care and caution as indeed might, and should have been used, but which it is not to be generally expected will be used. These are sins, it is true, but yet such as are very well consistent with mercy; such as we ought to reform, but yet such as, if we live and die in them, will not, upon a general repentance, rob us of the favour of God.—But besides these there is another ignorance, such as it may more reasonably be expected we should be free from; an ignorance which proceeds from a corrupted mind or a depraved heart; where men miss of information from a disregard to God, or an indifference towards truth; or when their eyes are blinded, or their affections alienated from it by pride, sensuality, or other unreasonable and prevailing passions. And here our conduct will contract a greater or less degree of guilt, and be criminal exactly in that proportion in which our ignorance is so. Such a conduct therefore it behoves us timely to consider of and amend, it being undoubtedly what will deprive us of the favour of God; and is such a state as, while we continue in it, will not suffer his mercy to be extended towards us.

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Again, as to sins wilfully committed, — We may observe here, as we did before in the case of ignorance, that as there must be some knowledge of the law to make transgressions criminal, so must there be in all sins some degree of wilfulness to make them sinful; but then this may be but small, — there may be much more of weakness or pitiable frailty in it than of the other. — Thoughts may unexpectedly dart into the mind, and hinder our attention to better things. — Sudden starts of passion, such as hope, fear or anger, may for a little while run away with us, before we can summon in our reason to our assistance. — Attendance to our natural wants, to our callings and business in the world, may sometimes put us a little off our guard, and make us less careful than we ought to be; may render us not so well fitted for some duties, or make us perform others but imperfectly. But these are sins which, it is to be hoped, will be looked upon as pitiable infirmities, and be found consistent with mercy; since they are not the effect of a vitiated heart, or a greater love of temporal than of spiritual things; but were the choice proposed deliberately to us, we should chuse as we ought to do, and the love of God would be the prevailing principle in us. — But when, on the other hand, they proceed from

from passions neglected, or cherished and indulged to an unreasonable height—from a temper and disposition of mind greatly averse and alienated from God and virtue;—when they are committed with deliberation and design; this is sinning presumptuously, and is what David calls *the great offence*. This is breaking off all friendship with God; for no one can be esteemed a friend to another, whose interest he can hurt with deliberation and design.

And as to sins habitually committed.—We should consider, that even sins of infirmity, and such as are otherwise pardonable, when not taken due care of, but suffered to grow into habits, lose their nature and cease to be any longer such. By practice they gather strength; corrupt the mind, and before they can have settled into a habit, must have estranged the heart from God. Single acts of sin, which are not continued in, may sometimes be consistent with a state of Grace: for there is a wide difference between a man who sometimes falls into a fault through surprize or weakness, and one who goes on in a continued practice of it. It is possible for a patient man to be sometimes betrayed into a fit of immoderate anger; but then he soon recovers his former temper, and endeavours to guard against be-

ing so easily overcome in that manner again. Whereas when a man habitually commits it, it must proceed from the prevailing temper of his mind, and he is stirred up to it by every provocation.—In like manner a sober man may happen to fall into an act of intemperance; but then he soon recovers himself, and resolves to avoid all occasions of it for the future. Whereas to those who practise it habitually, it is like nature itself, and they cannot live without it. So that we may easily see, which of these two states is entitled to mercy and forgiveness, and which is not.

There are likewise some single acts of vice, which seem to have the nature and guilt of habits; such are all crying and flagrant sins, as perjury, murder, adultery, &c. These cannot be committed till the mind and temper of a man is corrupted to a very high degree; till he has lost all the feelings of humanity, or his heart is polluted with lust or impurity; till by frequent thoughts he has reconciled himself to these things; till he has destroyed in himself all reverence for God, and weakened the force of natural conscience.

However, even those sins, which are inconsistent with a state of pardon and forgiveness

giveness, are yet no longer so than while we suffer ourselves to continue in them. They do not put a man into such a state as he cannot alter; but the mischief continues no longer than the cause of it subsists. If a man breaks off his sins, his condition alters with his circumstances: just as he who has contracted any mortal disease is undoubtedly in a dangerous and dreadful case, so long as he suffers that disease to remain upon him; but if by proper care and remedies he eradicates the distemper, he is restored again to a state of health and security.

Quest. Although our case may be thus altered, and God be willing, upon our true and sincere repentance and amendment, to forgive us our sins; yet may not our long continuance in them render it extremely difficult, or almost impossible for us to do so? May not our hearts be so hardened, and our desires so united to our sinful pleasures, that it shall scarce be possible to disengage them?

Answ. As the Scripture calls upon all persons in general, to repent and amend; and as those few passages, which seem to have a contrary aspect, are capable of a milder interpretation, it looks most proba-

ble, that the season of grace and pardon expires not but with life itself. — But though repentance and mercy be not absolutely impossible in this life, yet a man may approach nearer and nearer to such a state. He may by misuse or neglect so weaken all the faculties of his mind, and drive away from himself the spirit of Grace; till by degrees he has made his return, tho' not absolutely impossible, yet highly improbable, and rendered his case little less than desperate.

A very small degree of reflection may make us sensible, that it is with the mind as with the body. As all it's powers and faculties are strengthened and improved by exercise, and on the other hand degenerate and grow feebler by sloth and inactivity, so likewise will it be with those of the mind. All it's faculties, for want of use, will languish and decay, and there will remain no strength to perform our work. — Our judgment, by not being properly exercised, is apt to lose it's quickness and solidity, and becomes less able to direct us. Our courage and resolution, not being duly exerted, abate of their vigour and firmness, and shrink at the appearance of danger. Every rational faculty proper for our recovery, by being neglected, comes in the end

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to lose it's force, and is of less service to us in our necessity. When men have continued long in sin, it will be a matter of much more difficulty to bring them to consideration, and make them take a view of their bad estate. They are like an extravagant tradesman, who, while his affairs are in a tolerable condition, and the balance not likely to turn out very much to his disadvantage, may perhaps be persuaded to look into his accounts; but when things are very much behind-hand, there he is apt to drive it off from time to time, till at last his ruin is compleated. Men do not love to entertain themselves with their own follies and imperfections, but are apt to cast their faults behind them, and are unwilling to look into that glass which presents them with an unamiable picture of themselves, though at the same time it be a true one. And yet without this nothing is to be done. Where men will not look upon their faults, they can see no necessity, and consequently enter into no proper measures, for their amendment.——The longer men continue in sin, so much the faster hold will it take of them, and so much the more difficult will it be for them to leave it. Few, at their first setting out, venture upon great and enormous crimes; they begin, it may be, with carelessness only, and want of considera-

tion. This, by not being remedied, betrays them into greater evils, which by little and little increase in them, and come at last, before they are regarded perhaps, to settle into habits. These by indulgence gather still greater strength, till in the end they become like nature itself; so that to reform them is a work of the most consummate difficulty, and what we find but very few who successfully perform. Nay, all those arguments and motives, which should prompt us to exert ourselves and shake off this dominion of sin, will then be much weakened, and act less forcibly upon us. —The awe and reverence of the divine Being, by being often slighted and disregarded, becomes cheap and feeble. Conscience, having long remonstrated in vain, comes at length to lose it's force. The threatnings of the gospel, having been frequently despised, abate of their influence; we become quite incapable of feeling, and our heart grows *hard as the nether milstone*.

Besides this, God may, by a most just judgment for his obstinacy and folly, remove to a greater distance from the sinner his holy Spirit, the continuation of which might have an ill effect upon the industry of others, and let the adversary of his sal-
vation

vation have a nearer approach to him. Accordingly he has denounced in Scripture, that his *Spirit shall not always strive with man* : And again, *My people would not hear my voice, and Israel would have none of me ; so I gave them up unto their own heart's lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations.*

Quest. You have offered to my view a very melancholy estate of persons in great measure deserted by God, and given up to their own heart's lusts, and to the temptations of the enemy of their salvation. Let me now hear how a man may best preserve himself from this state ; or, if he has already been so unhappy as in any degree to fall into it, how he may soonest recover himself out of it.

Answ. The best means to prevent our falling into such a state is, by worshiping him as we ought to do, to keep up in our mind a due reverence and regard for the divine Being, and an awful sense of his majesty ; more especially by fervent prayer requesting of him, that he would preserve us safe, and continue constantly his grace unto us, to prevent our falling into evil. Or when we have failed in our duty, and made any approaches towards such an unhappy condition, we should beg earnestly
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of him, that he would forgive us what is past, that he would restore us to our former rectitude of mind, and assist us in overcoming the like temptations for the future.

Quest. Since you mention the worship of God, will you instruct me a little farther in the nature and usefulness of that worship which we are to pay to him, and in particular concerning the duty of prayer, against which there seem to lie many objections? Prayer is said to be an acknowledgement of our dependence upon God, and petitioning him for all those good things, both spiritual and temporal blessings, which we stand so much in need of. But then, is not God acquainted with all our wants before we ask him? Nay, does he not know them much better than we ourselves? What need therefore is there for us to inform him, or of what service can this duty of prayer be to us? We are so far from being able to inform him, that we are, in many cases, ignorant of our own wants, and therefore cannot know what to ask for, but must leave it to him to determine for us.— And as we cannot by prayer inform God, so neither can we by strength of argument persuade, or by fair speeches entice him to comply with our desires. He will do always that which is right and best to be

be done, whether we ask him or not. No petitions or persuasions can influence him to depart from that. To what purpose therefore do we offer them, or why attempt that, which we may be before-hand assured is impossible to be done?

Ans. You would do well to consider, that the end and design of prayer is not either to inform or to persuade God, but to benefit ourselves. He can receive no advantage by it, but we may. It is a very proper way to improve us in virtue, and to produce in us many excellent qualifications and dispositions of mind, which render us fit objects of God's favour, and make it right and meet for him to do that for us, which otherwise it might have been improper for him to have done.

Prayer gives us a true sense of our condition, and obliges us to look narrowly into our own hearts. How else can we represent our case to God, if we ourselves continue ignorant of it? how acknowledge our wants and dependence on him, if we have not ourselves a due sense of them? Prayer therefore, when it is performed as it ought to be, brings us acquainted with our own hearts, which is the very first step towards our amendment. It is a duty highly expedient,

expedient, and fitted to amend ourselves, though not to inform or persuade God ; and may for that reason be both required and rewarded by him.

Prayer likewise teaches us to form just and worthy notions of the divine perfections, and of our obligations towards him, —leaves a strong impression of his authority upon our minds, and of the danger of disobeying it,—and, by the frequency of it's returns, keeps up in us a strong and lively sense of it. And what more powerful motive to virtue than the frequent recollection of these things ? to have our minds constantly refreshed and invigorated with such considerations, when otherwise, perhaps, they would have been but seldom thought of or attended to by us ? — External objects are apt to present themselves before us in a very ensnaring attitude, and will captivate our affections, if we suffer our contemplation to dwell upon them. Prayer then calls off our minds, and diverts our attention from these things : It breaks their force and disengages us from them, and so prevents the mischief which would otherwise ensue. — Nay, by turning our thoughts frequently into a different channel, it gives us quite another cast and temper of mind ; and by displaying before

us spiritual and divine objects, it gives us a despicable opinion of those meaner enjoyments, which otherwise are apt to have so great power and influence over us.

Quest. All these good effects, I must acknowledge, will follow from the due performance of this duty of prayer; but then this is not the only way of producing them. — Will not frequent and devout contemplation do the same?—will not that also give us a knowledge of ourselves?—will not that keep up in us a strong and lively sense of our obligations?—will not that take us off from the light and gay amusements of this world, and, by fixing them on better, put us into a good frame and temper of mind? And if so, what occasion is there for prayer?—or why has God bound it upon us, as an indispensable duty?

Answ. I might observe to you, that there is but little difference between devout meditation and prayer, when both are exerted upon the same great and interesting subjects; and that if these were more different than they are, yet in this state of weakness and depravity no helps should be neglected, which are proper for our purpose. But though each of these methods should be
equally

equally proper for some men, yet may they not be alike so for others. Set some persons to consider, who are not much used to the work, and how loose and incoherent will their thoughts be ! Whereas bid them pray, and you put them into a proper channel. By appointing this duty of prayer then, God has shewn us into what form we are to cast our thoughts, what method of consideration is most proper for us to use. And is it not a great advantage to have God picking out for us that particular method, from among many others, which is most proper for those circumstances wherein he has placed us, and which is of all others most likely to bring us quickly to a due frame and temper of mind ?

The duty of prayer lays us under greater obligations, and consequently is an argument for greater care in the performance of our duty. All rational creatures indeed are under an obligation to serve and obey their Maker, from which nothing can release them ; But then such an obligation may be heightened, by adding to this natural and necessary a more voluntary one likewise ; and this is what the duty of prayer may be esteemed to do. For when we thus ask for grace and assistance, what do we in effect but engage to use them ?
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If this is not understood, we are only mocking God, by petitioning him for talents which we never intend to use. When we address him as a Father or Master, we in fact oblige ourselves to obey him as dutiful children or faithful servants. So that if we are careless and remiss in these respects, we violate not only our natural obligation, but also that voluntary one, which by the performance of this duty we may be thought to have laid ourselves under.— Besides, when we are speaking to God, our attention will be kept closer by the awe of his presence; we shall be less subject to levity, than when we are conversing with ourselves only in contemplation.

Such are the advantages attending the sincere practice of this duty. To which let me add, that it will be impossible for any one, who is much conversant in it, to continue long a bad man; but he will at length, if he stedfastly perseveres, get the better of all his vices: Whereas by the neglect of it, he will find himself by degrees decline in virtue, till at last he is involved in guilt and enslaved by iniquity.

Quest. Since prayer is so useful and necessary a part of divine worship, I will request

quest some farther directions from you how it is to be performed.

Answ. In the first place, all our prayers should be accompanied with reverence and attention of mind. The majesty of that Being whom we address,—the importance of the things we ask,—nay, the very nature of the duty, demand no less. Prayer is the voice of the mind and heart, not of the lips only; so that not to pray with attention, is not to pray at all, nor will it answer the end of devotion.—To pray with indecency or irreverence is to affront, rather than honour that majesty to whom we address ourselves; and will be accordingly resented. It will therefore be useful for us, as our thoughts are apt to keep on in that channel in which they have before been running, and cannot at once be diverted into another course,—Nay, it will be requisite for us, as far as conveniently may be, to allow ourselves some time between our business or pleasures, and our devotions, in order to compose and settle ourselves in a suitable frame and temper of mind.

As our prayers should be accompanied with reverence and attention, so should they be also attended with a firm trust in God's promises:

promises ; not a belief that we shall obtain whatever we ask, for that is no where promised ; but that he will answer our petitions in such a manner as shall be most expedient for us. By doubting we damp the fervour and blunt the edge of our devotions ; since none will prosecute that vigorously, which they have but little hope of succeeding in. Our petitions therefore should be made, not absolutely, but only with submission to the will of God. When we ask of him things improper to be granted, or even good things for ill purposes, what are we doing but begging of God to depart from his perfections, in compliance with some fond or unreasonable fancy of our own ? what but courting a disappointment, by preferring such requests, as we might before-hand be assured he would never grant ?

We should also take care that we come before God with a pure heart and mind, and with a full intention to mortify all sinful and irregular passions. To ask of him forgiveness, with design to offer him the like affronts again,——to desire infinite purity to be reconciled with foul pollution, the beauty of holiness with the deformity of Sin, is an insult and mockery offered unto God, and instead of rendering our

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prayers acceptable, will only turn them into sin. In particular we must put away all malice and revenge, and have our minds disposed to Charity and forgiveness towards our brethren, whenever they shall make themselves fit objects of them; it being highly absurd to ask God to do that for us, which we are not as ready to do for others.

To these we may add another circumstance, namely, that we be frequent in the performance of this duty. Our regard to God,---our adherence to virtue, will not be kept up and preserved in us, unless we are so. Disuse will weaken it's influence on us; the lamps of our piety will cease to burn, if not constantly supplied with the oil of devotion. To determine what times are necessary, every one's own prudence must be his guide. So much undoubtedly is required from every one, as is sufficient to answer the ends and purposes of this duty, and make it subservient to his perfection and happiness.

Nor are we to be frequent only, but we must also use perseverance in this duty. Prayer is a means that works gradually upon us; it does not bring us in an instant to that temper of mind, which it is designed to promote, nor makes us at once fit for the reception

reception of God's favours. We should not therefore conclude ourselves forsaken by him, if he does not presently answer our petitions; but rather continue them more earnestly, and use greater diligence, that we may the sooner become proper objects for being gratified in our requests.

I might add to this, that all prayer is to be offered up to God through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and of him only: for there is but one mediator, we are told, between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and through him alone it is that we have access to the Father.

Quest. Shall we now proceed to the other part of that worship which we owe to God, viz. Thanksgiving? And indeed, when we consider him as the fountain of all good, from whose bounty we have received our existence, and to whose favour we stand indebted for all we enjoy, and all we are to hope for; it must be owned, that gratitude is a very proper return for all these things, and what in reason we ought to pay him. But then, is not this sufficiently done by a dutiful behaviour? Why are we obliged to recount these benefits, to proclaim his excellencies, and to offer up to him praise and thanksgiving? Can we sup-

pose that God has any pleasure in our ceremonious acknowledgments, or that he takes delight in hearing his perfections divulged? Are not these things fitted rather to please little and weak minds, than to afford any satisfaction to a Being of infinite wisdom and perfection? Why then has he commanded us to do so? Why are we called upon to shew forth all his praise, and to tell out his works with gladness?

Ans. It is with this duty of Thanksgiving, as it was before with that of Prayer. It is not required on account of any benefit or pleasure that God receives from it; but for the good effects which it has upon ourselves. — Thanksgiving bespeaks our attention to God's benefits. It requires of us to bring them into view, and to make a right estimation of them, without which our returns for them will always be inadequate. Our gratitude rises or falls, in proportion to the value we set on the favour received. Men are apt to think themselves but little obliged for that, which they but little regard. The sincere practice of this duty tends to furnish us with a just sense of the divine benefits, and of those returns which are due for them; whereas, on the other hand, when dissolved in pleasure, — when employed in business, or when hurried

ried away by passions and inclinations, we neglect the performance of it, we seldom gain right notions of his favours or of our obligations for them.

Besides, let our notions both of the value and importance of these things and of our own obligations for them be ever so just and right; yet, unless frequently renewed, they are apt to slip out of our memory, and so lose that influence over us which they ought to have. For though benefits, even when the particulars of them are forgotten, may yet leave upon the mind a general sense of God's favour and goodness towards us, yet will they act more forcibly, when by the practice of this duty they are kept alive, and all the circumstances of them preserved fresh in our memory. So that if a man is minded to make the best return he can for these things, there is no surer way of doing it, than, by frequent acknowledgment, to cherish the remembrance of them, and not suffer them to decay or perish from his mind.

Thanksgiving likewise makes more easy to us every other part of our duty, by representing God to our minds in a most engaging and amiable light,—as our friend, our father,—the great original of goodness,

and dispenser of all our enjoyments. And who can consider him thus? who can frequently and seriously view him in this light, without having his heart more closely knit and his affections more intensely united to him? And then let me ask, What more powerful motive than love? What stronger incitement to obedience? How is every difficulty apt to be overlooked, every danger to vanish, when opposed to that love, which the practice of this duty tends to produce.

The exercise of praise and thanksgiving seems also wisely, as well as kindly, adapted by God, to be as it were a counterpoise to that state of mind which the opposite duty of prayer tends to beget in us. Prayer turns our mind to the infinite dangers with which we are on all sides surrounded, and represents to us how unable we are of ourselves to fence against them. — Prayer obliges us to consider our vileness and imperfections, — how many instances of folly we have been guilty of in our past behaviour, and how liable we are to them in our future conduct. Prayer fixes our mind on the law we have broken, and the punishment due to such transgression. And these are reflections, which would be apt to produce in us dark and gloomy thoughts, to sink and depress our spirits, and to give us a melancholy

melancholy cast and turn of mind, had not God wisely ordained, that these our supplications should be tempered and intermixed with the duty of Thanksgiving;—had he not brightened up this uncomfortable scene with a more chearful prospect, and made it our duty to give him thanks, as well as to supplicate him for a supply of our necessities.

Quest. All these good effects, I believe, will follow from the worship of God; but may they not be produced by private, as well as by public worship? Why then has God ordained that we should perform our devotions in public? May we not do this as sincerely and as acceptably by ourselves alone, as in company with others,—in our own closet, as in his house? Why is it therefore that we are commanded to come into his tabernacle and join with the Assembly in our addresses to him?

Ans. If there were no other reason to be given for our compliance, but barely the command of God, it would be entirely inexcusable in us not to comply. Can we prescribe what duties are most suitable to our nature, better than he can? Were our temporal Governors to require our obedience to any one law, which they had enacted for the public good, would it be

deemed a sufficient excuse for us to say, We think it not of such absolute necessity but that it may be dispensed with, — that instead of it we will obey some other law, which we think will answer the purpose as well? Would not such a behaviour deserve a double punishment, as it carried in it contempt as well as disobedience?

But public worship is not only the command of God, but it is likewise of great use and benefit in the world, as it is the means of promoting his honour, and giving men just and worthy opinions of him, without which they would be less inclined to serve him and pay obedience to his laws. To pray to him for future favours, is to declare that we think him powerful and benevolent; and to praise him for past, is to acknowledge that we have found him so. But this is not to be effected by our private addresses; They may be useful for ourselves indeed, and serve to kindle up the flame of our own devotions; but with respect to others, are but like a candle hid under a bushel: whereas our light must shine before men, if we intend that they should glorify our Father which is in heaven. Nay, even our open declarations carry not in them the same weight, nor have the same force as our public worship;

ship ; since what we profess in words may not always come from the heart : Whereas when men can leave their callings and worldly occupations, when they can spare a reasonable and decent time from their gain, their pleasures, or other avocations, to come and attend on the service of God, and are seen to be constant and assiduous in it ; this shews them to be more in earnest, adds strength and confirmation to what they profess, and may induce others with whom their judgment has any weight, their favour any force, or their example any influence, to come and do likewise.

Public worship has also a very great tendency to keep religion in countenance, and gain it credit in the world. Religion has at all times had it's enemies, who have endeavoured to destroy it's interests, and to raise a party against it ; and numbers are apt to have great influence, over weak minds especially, who are loth to be singular even in a good cause. And though they would exert themselves vigorously, where they find they are supported ; yet, when left to themselves, will make but little stand. It is requisite therefore that Religion should have it's friends, to give it countenance and encouragement,—to take off from it the imputation of singularity,—
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to afford support to such weak brethren, till they come to have strength enough to support themselves,—and to prevent religion from being oppressed and overborn. Wicked men will likewise be less forward in their attacks, when they see themselves in danger of being opposed by numbers. It is for this reason, among others, that God would not have good men stand single in their relation to him, but hath connected them into one common body or Church; and hath instituted public worship as a band to link them together, and to be an open and standing declaration of their connection with him and with each other. So that if men are not willing to cut themselves off from that society which he has appointed, and to give up their Religion to the insults of wicked men, they should give all possible attendance to public worship, and take every convenient opportunity of joining in it.

The practice of this duty tends moreover to promote and establish mutual benevolence and friendship among good men. Look into the world, and see what affection men usually conceive for each other, who are embarked in the same cause, or enlisted into the same society or party! What good-will subsists between persons of the same

same city, community or nation, where no particular quarrel intervenes ! And why should not the service of God as powerfully unite them,—cause them to *take sweet counsel together, and walk in the house of God as friends?*—We shall be farther persuaded of this tendency, when we reflect that public worship brings us together to ask favours, not for ourselves alone, but with the most tender concern to do it for others also, and to testify our readiness by all reasonable means to promote each other's welfare. And though a man may do this in some measure in his private devotions ; yet is it not so evident, nor does it tend to link men so fast together in friendship, as a more open profession would do.

It is by means of this duty also, that religion is kept alive and preserved in the world. The generality of mankind have but little leisure, and perhaps much less inclination, for the performance of devotion : so that were there not some stated times and places, to which they are, by custom and decency as it were, obliged to resort, men would be in great danger either of neglecting this duty of religion wholly, or but very rarely complying with it.—The bulk of mankind likewise have neither
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time nor abilities to acquire any great knowledge in religion ; and if they do get any considerable acquaintance with it, must have it by means of living instructors, and by such methods as will convey it into their minds, without much trouble and pains. And were men left to their own private endeavours only, without any public opportunities of joining in the worship of God, or being instructed in the doctrines of the gospel, and having motives and arguments for a virtuous life offered to their consideration, we should soon find all religion to decline and vanish out of the world.—Or were there some few of a more contemplative genius and better disposition, who could make shift to do without such public advantages, yet since the generality neither can nor will, it must be highly criminal not to countenance, by their compliance and example, that which is so generally necessary.

Quest. Be it so then, that public worship is both a necessary and useful duty ; yet what am I to think of those external ordinances and institutions, with which it is generally accompanied ?

Answ. External ordinances were designed only to promote and encourage in us good
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and virtuous dispositions of mind, and should be considered only as the means to that end. They will therefore never serve, or be accepted instead of moral virtues. To rest in them as sufficient, without the practice of moral duties, is to take up with the means only, without ever obtaining the end they were designed to produce. They have in them no intrinsic goodness, nor any power of obliging, but what arises from their being commanded; whereas moral duties are of natural and unchangeable obligation. The former may be, and have been in many cases, dispensed with; the other never. The less therefore any religion has of external observances, the more perfect it is to be esteemed. But then it may be questioned, whether a religion the most perfect in itself be best suited to the imperfect state and condition of mankind. It may be the religion of angels, or suited to men in some more advanced state, but I doubt will not be found so proper for us while we are in this. As long as we are in the body, and surrounded with sensible and corporeal objects, the inward devotion of our mind will require to be excited and expressed by outward acts of religion; and we must glorify God in our bodies, as the Apostle advises, as well as in our Spirit.

Outward

Outward signs then and sensible Rites may serve as a memorial, to keep up in our minds the remembrance of any remarkable transaction or blessing of God.—When he made a covenant with Abraham, he instituted the rite of circumcision, as a memorial of it to future generations. . So also, under the Mosaic dispensation, there were sensible signs and positive rites appointed, to keep up in the minds of his people a lasting remembrance of God's commands, or of some peculiar blessings.—The deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt, and the destruction of the Egyptians in the red sea, one would think, could hardly ever have been forgotten by them; and yet we find it was so. They forgot his works, we are told, and the wonderful things which he shewed among them. And how entirely must the memory of that transaction have been lost in after ages, had not God appointed such a sensible memorial of it, as was proper to preserve it!—And not only in Scripture do we find these things, but this is what the wisdom of all nations has thought the most certain way of perpetuating any event, and to prevent it's being forgotten.

Again, though men do not actually forget these things, yet are they too apt to disregard them,

them, and not call them to mind so frequently as they should do ; by which means they are less affected by them, and they come to lose that influence which otherwise they would have had upon them. Whereas positive rites and institutions, by their constant return and fitness to represent it, not only prevent the thing from being forgotten, but keep up a more lively and vigorous sense of it in our minds, afford us more frequent occasions of meditating on it, and remind us of our obligations and those returns which we should make for them ; and thus become such motives to real virtue as perhaps we should not have had without them.

Farther, even those things which do come frequently into view, are not usually attended to with that steadiness and closeness which they should be. It is one of the hardest tasks in our duty, to take our thoughts off from sensual, and settle them upon spiritual things. External ordinances therefore, being of a more sensible nature, may serve to fix our attention, and prevent it's wandering ; and by their aptness to represent may carry our thoughts more steadily to what is represented by them. External ordinances also may be useful to preserve decency and decorum in the service of God.—But though they may be
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thus useful, yet must they be under some limitation and restriction. They must not be such as the mind shall be apt to terminate in or rely upon, but such as shall have a fitness or tendency to carry it on to something farther.—They must not be pompous and gaudy, lest by their great glare they take the mind and thoughts off from what they ought to be employed about, and fix them upon their gay and splendid appearance :—They must not be needless, for that would be to act for no purpose, and only to lavish away our time and endeavours :—They must not be burdensome, either in their nature or their number, for that would tend to make men weary, and cause them to loathe the service of the Lord.

The Christian Religion has required of us the observance of two only, as necessary to salvation, which are usually called by the name of Sacraments ; and these too not absolutely, but only generally necessary, that is, where they may be had, and are not overlooked by a contemptuous disregard or heedless neglect.

Quest. Will you let me know what these two sacraments are, which you say are thus necessary, and likewise explain to me the term

term itself, and shew me what I am to understand by this word Sacrament?

Ans^r. There are, as I told you, two only, which are Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. By Baptism we are admitted into Christ's Church, and profess ourselves his disciples and followers;—by communicating in the Lord's supper we declare our continuance in that profession. By Baptism we covenant to yield obedience to all God's commands;—by partaking of his supper, we perpetually confirm and renew that covenant, and keep alive in ourselves a due sense of the obligations we have laid ourselves under; according to the meaning of the word itself, which signifies an oath or obligation by which we bind ourselves to any duty.—We may observe also, that in a Sacrament, there must be some outward and visible sign or ceremony, such as water in Baptism, or bread and wine in the Lord's supper, to be as it were a public testimony or witness of the covenant between God and us. This outward and visible sign must also be such as is fitted to express or represent to us some inward or spiritual grace, blessing, or favour, which God has promised to the worthy performance of such outward ceremony; which in Baptism is our death unto Sin and a new
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birth unto righteousness, represented by the cleansing or washing us with water : And in the Lord's supper, the body and blood of Christ, offered up and given for us, which is aptly figured out to us by the bread and wine.

Nor is it every thing, which is a proper emblem or representation of any spiritual benefit or advantage, that is to be accounted a Sacrament, unless it have also the sanction of our Lord, and be such as is appointed by Christ himself.—This outward sign must also be the means of our receiving, or of conveying to us, such inward and spiritual Grace. Not that this benefit is naturally and necessarily connected with such outward performance ; but is annexed to it by the mere will and pleasure of God : so that every one who performs these ceremonies worthily, with due qualifications of mind, shall have such benefit bestowed upon him ; but not the unworthy. Baptism in order to our receiving the benefits of it, must be not only the putting away the filth of the flesh, but likewise the answer of a good conscience towards God.—Nor shall every one, who receives the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's supper, be a partaker of the spiritual advantages, if at the same time he
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discerneth not the Lord's body, but is a wicked and profane person.

Quest. Is there any thing farther needful for me to be acquainted with concerning these Sacraments?

Answ. As to the Sacrament of Baptism, since I have shewn you, that it is a covenant between God and us, for the obtaining of spiritual blessings by our obedience to his Will, there will remain little more to be said, than to explain to you the fitness which this outward action of washing with water has to represent to us this our death unto sin and new birth unto Righteousness. And this aptness will appear from the custom of washing infants from the pollution of their birth at their entrance into the world, mentioned in Ezek. Chap. xvi. Ver. 4, 5. where he describes the condition of Jerusalem, under that of an exposed infant. *In the day thou wast born, thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed with water, — but thou wast cast out into the open field to the loathing of thy person.* The resemblance therefore is very apt and proper; as infants are washed from the defilements of their person at their entrance into the world, or the beginning of this natural life, so are we in Baptism, to signify

nify our being dead unto sin, or cleansed from the defilements of sin, and beginning a new and spiritual life of righteousness. That our former life being at an end, and we, as it were, dead unto sin, do by this rite profess ourselves to rise again in a new life of righteousness unto God.—From hence it is that Baptism is aptly stiled the laver of regeneration, or that washing which is to represent our coming into a new and spiritual life. From hence also it is that we are said to be born of water; and from hence, in a very intelligible though somewhat figurative sense, we are said to be dead with Christ (i. e. as he was) to be buried with him by Baptism, and to rise again with him in newness of life.

Equally expressive of this is the manner in which this ordinance was usually, though not always, administered in the ancient Church, viz. by immersion: where by our descent into the water was represented our being buried unto Sin, and by our coming out of it our rising again unto righteousness. But tho' this was the usual way of administering Baptism in warmer countries, yet even there it was not the only one. It was sometimes administered by pouring water on the persons baptized, in all cases of exigency, as when the care of their health,

health, when haste, or when scarcity of materials required it. And such baptism was always accounted equally good and valid as the other, nor was it ever suffer'd to be repeated. And indeed the baptism with the Holy Ghost, which Christ had promised to his disciples, is spoken of by St. Peter, Acts ii. in terms not at all applicable to immersion or dipping; for he there calls it the *pouring out* of his Spirit upon them: and a little after he says, God hath *shed forth* upon us that which ye now see and hear. We ought not therefore to confine to one manner only, what the first and purest ages of the Church have left open to more.

I shall only observe to you farther, that Repentance and Faith in Jesus Christ, are qualifications required of persons at their baptism.

Quest. But infants having committed no actual sin have therefore no need of repentance; and are incapable of believing in Christ. How then can they be proper subjects of this ordinance?

Answ. That baptism ought not to be denied to infants there have been offered many learned and forcible arguments, taken

not only from the usage of the times immediately succeeding the Apostles, when they could not be supposed ignorant of their practice, but also from several passages of Scripture. But I shall here insist on one, which has not had so much force given to it, as I think it will bear. It proceeds thus—God made a covenant with Abraham—*I will establish my covenant between me and thee.*—This covenant was not the same with the Mosaic or Legal one established with the Jewish nation at Horeb; for St. Paul makes a plain difference between them, when he tells the Galatians, *The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, (that is, the Abrahamic covenant) the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul.*—But though the covenant made with Abraham was different from the Jewish, it is one and the same with the Christian covenant, which is only the Abrahamic continued; for *to Abraham and his seed*, we are told, *in their generations* the covenant was made: and St. Paul tells us who they are,—not the natural seed only, but *those that are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.* Again he says, *The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham,*
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In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith, (Gentiles as well as Jews) are blessed, (that is, partakers of this covenant) with faithful Abraham. It was for this reason, namely, their being admitted into the same covenant, that the Jews so zealously opposed the Gentile converts, and insisted upon their being circumcised. For the Gentiles might have been admitted into a distinct covenant, by any other rite, without any injury or offence to them at all.

In this Abrahamic, or (as we may now call it) Christian covenant, these three things were required, First, That the persons to be admitted should be of the seed of Abraham.—*I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations.* Secondly, They were to be admitted into it by circumcision.—*This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you and thy seed after thee, every man-child among you shall be circumcised.* Thirdly, They were to be admitted in their childhood ;—*And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations.*—Now whatsoever is once sufficiently and upon good grounds established, will continue binding, till altered by a competent authority.

authority. These three things therefore being proved from scripture, that the progeny of Abraham are to be admitted,—by circumcision,—and that in their childhood, into the Abrahamic or Christian covenant, they will stand good and binding till we can shew they have received such an alteration. Now as for the first of these, that this covenant was confined to Abraham's seed, God has sufficiently altered that by breaking down, as we are told, the partition-wall that was between us, and commanding his Apostles to admit as his disciples, not Jews only, but all nations: and St. Paul has assured us, that there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but that we are all one in Christ. And as for circumcision, which was the second point, the command is now not to circumcise but to baptize all nations, and the Apostles at Jerusalem, when the question was put to them, determined expressly against this rite, calling it a yoke, which neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear. But then as to the third particular, since we find that no where altered, it will be still binding, and must remain as it was at first ordained. So that they who call for a warrant from God's word for this practice, may here find one, and be convinced, that this is not an unscriptural notion, as they
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are pleased to call it, but rests on the scriptures as it's surest foundation.

And as for Faith, though we find it required of those who are capable of it, in order to their being baptized, yet this will not warrant us, without a more exprefs command, in excluding all such as are not capable of it, but who give all the security that can be given for their believing all the doctrines of the Gospel, as soon as they become capable of knowing and understanding them?

Quest. Will you now proceed to the other sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and shew me what you think to be the nature and design of that?

Ans. That Christ was truly and properly a sacrifice for sin you have already seen. Now it was usual, as well among the Gentiles as under the Jewish dispensation, for the persons who sacrificed to sit down and feast upon part of what was offered up, in token of that amity and friendship now subsisting between them and the Deity, who, being thus reconciled to them, admitted them as friends and guests to his table. And to this the Apostle alludes, when he says, *Christ*
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our passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, &c. But now Christ our great sacrifice being once offered, and God fully reconciled to mankind, there is no need of any farther sacrifices, seeing he hath for ever perfected those who come unto him; and accordingly they have from that time ceased in the Christian Church, and there remains now no more offering for sin. And as we have now no longer sacrifices, so no longer have we sacrificial feasts, but something instituted in allusion to both. Christ, in order to preserve in our mind a grateful sense of them, has ordained bread and wine, to be now, not a real sacrifice, but only a memorial of it; and has commanded us to receive them, not as a sacrificial feast, but only as a representation of it, or in allusion to it. *This do*, he says, *in remembrance of me.* It is not therefore the sacrifice itself, or the natural body and blood of Christ, which we feed upon, but only the symbols of it. And as the Jews called the Lamb, which in after ages was only a memorial of it, by the name of the first—the Lord's passover; so Christ our passover, who was sacrificed for us, by a like figure of speech, terms the bread and wine, which were only the resemblances of them, his body and his blood,

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We may farther observe that this feasting was used also, in the eastern countries especially, as a federal rite, or method of entering into covenant with one another. Thus when Isaac made a covenant with Abimelech, he made a feast for him and them that were with him, and they did eat and drink, and rose up betimes in the morning, and sware to each other.—So when Laban made a covenant with Jacob, they took up stones and made an heap, and did eat upon the heap. Thus also when the Gibeonites came to propose a covenant with the Israelites, it is said, the men of Israel took of their victuals, *i. e.* made a covenant with them, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.—Thus also the Hebrew word used for a covenant [כְּרִית] is taken from a word which signifies to eat [בָּרַח] So that our eating and drinking at the Lord's table may be considered as a constant renewal of that covenant between us, and is appointed by him as a token and pledge to assure us thereof: on God's side, that he will make good to us all his gracious promises; on our's, that we will continue stedfast in the observance of his commandments, and no longer offend him by a wicked and licentious life. And in this sense we find it stiled in the new testament, *the blood of the covenant.*

Quest.

Quest. You have shewn me the nature and design of this Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; that our receiving it is a continual profession of our faith in Christ, and a renewal of that covenant which we made with him in baptism. Will you now proceed to inform me what are the advantages of which we are partakers by receiving it?

Ans. Some indeed have affirmed this to be a rite constituted for the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism; but in this they seem to have ventured too far. The only ground and foundation for the remission of sins, is the great sacrifice and death of Christ: On this alone we must depend for forgiveness. The means of conveying this benefit to us is Baptism, by which we are admitted into Christ's Church, and entitled to all the advantages of his death, which are remission of all our sins, committed both before and after it, upon our true and sincere repentance and amendment. The benefits therefore, which we may expect to receive by a worthy participation of this supper, are not the remission of our sins, but are of a more moral nature. They are such as tend to excite and confirm in us good dispositions, and make us more holy and perfect. They are as it were a spiritual meal to strengthen and invigorate our souls,
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and preserve in us a sound and healthy constitution of mind. — To commemorate the death and sufferings of Christ tends to beget in us a hearty detestation of sin, which was the cause of his suffering, and to inspire us with more vigorous resolutions of forsaking it and amending. — To reflect on the most astonishing love, both of the Father in giving him, and of the Son who freely offered himself as a sacrifice for us, cannot but fill our hearts with the most affectionate gratitude for so inestimable a favour. — To meditate on this great offering for sin, serves to confirm our faith in God's promises, — to strengthen our reliance on him for the support of his Grace, the assistance of his spirit, and every thing needful to our salvation; according as the Apostle argues, *seeing he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.* To have in view the highest instance of charity and condescension towards us, who so little deserve it, is the strongest motive for enlarging our own towards all men; and must, if duly attended to, excite in us a disposition to follow so laudable an example. — Such, and many others of the like nature are the benefits which we receive from a due performance of this duty. But then we should remember, as I observed before,

fore, that these benefits are not annexed to the outward action or ceremonious performance, but flow from, and are promised only to the worthy participation of it.

Quest. If none but those who are worthy partakers of this Sacrament can hope for the enjoyment of the benefits, let me enquire farther, what is requisite in order to make us worthy partakers, or what are the qualifications and dispositions of mind, which it is necessary for a man to come prepared with?

Answ. One thing requisite to our worthy receiving it is, that we have a lively faith in God; or, as it is elsewhere explained, a full trust in his mercies. This is what the nature of the duty itself requires:—to pretend to commemorate that, which at the same time we do not believe, is offering the highest affront to God;—to set up in our own mind difficulties superior to it,—to imagine our sins either too many or too great for the blood of Christ to wash away, is to depreciate and undervalue this great sacrifice, as insufficient for the end for which it was offered;—to come even with diffidence or mistrust concerning the performance of them, is to deny the goodness and veracity of God, as if he had deluded us
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with false promises and raised in us expectations which he never intended to gratify. It is necessary therefore that we bring with us this faith, or a firm belief that if we perform the conditions required on our part, God both can and will make good to us those on his. — Whether we have actually performed these conditions and are reconciled to God, may be a matter of doubt to us; but this is not the faith required, nor would it render us a bit more acceptable to God if we had it. Nay this is what even wicked men very often have, who are frequently sanguine and presumptuous, apt to have a better opinion of themselves and their cause, than in reality they deserve. While, on the other hand, good men are often distrustful of themselves, and think their condition worse than it really is. So that we may doubt of our condition, and yet have this faith in God, which consists, not in a belief that our sins are forgiven, but that he will forgive them through Christ upon our true and sincere repentance.

This our faith should also manifest itself in a thankful remembrance, or grateful disposition of heart and mind for the benefits of Christ's passion. Some men's hearts indeed, according to their different tempers and constitutions, may be more enflamed,
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and cause them to exert themselves with greater fervour than others. But in those of all men there ought to be seated a high sense of the value and importance of this act of mercy, a right estimation of it, with suitable purposes of acting accordingly. Such a sense will have an influence upon our behaviour, and not suffer us to approach this table of the Lord with the same carelessness as we do a common meal, nor with the same indifference with which we transact our ordinary affairs; but will fix our thoughts and engage our attention to what we are doing; and is the best means to prevent those wandering thoughts, which are sometimes apt to crowd in even upon good men, and to render their prayers less effectual.

To faith and gratitude towards God, we ought to join love and benevolence towards our neighbour, which consists either in a disposition to do them good offices, or in a readiness to forgive them those injuries which they have done to us. We must be regardless indeed of that bright example which we commemorate, if we are not induced to copy after it; and though it is not possible but that offences will come and controversies arise, still we should endeavour to keep ourselves in a disposition not easily

easily to be provoked, but ready to be reconciled upon the most moderate and reasonable terms ;—never to carry things farther than is necessary, but willing rather to recede something from our just right, than to give up the cause of amity and good-will ;—not to exact hard measures or require an abject submission, but to be ready even to make the first advances, in order to be reconciled to our brother.—Nay, where men will not be wrought upon by gentle usage, but continue still injurious, though we are not obliged to give up our just rights, or continue our friendship and confidence to those who so little deserve them, or, by a neglect of defence, to lay ourselves open to violence and wrong, and so encourage and strengthen such men in their ill state of mind ; yet even here, we are not to hate them,—we are not to deny them those good offices which are due to them as men and Christians,—we are not to do any thing merely by way of retaliation or revenge, but for the preservation of peace, order and good government in the world. We are to pray for them and heartily to endeavour their amendment, and, whenever they make themselves proper objects of forgiveness, to receive them again with kindness and affection.

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Besides these duties which we owe to God and our neighbour, there is something remaining with respect to ourselves : and this is, to examine into our past conduct, and see whether it has been agreeable to the dictates of reason and the laws of Christianity. If we find in it any grievous enormities,—if a man has been guilty of lying and slandering,—if he has been a blasphemer of God, or a despiser of his word,—if he has lived in hatred and malice, or in the practice of fraud and violence towards others,—if he has indulged himself in riot and drunkenness, in debauchery, or any the like wilful and habitual sins ; he is then undoubtedly not only unfit to partake of this holy ordinance, but even to usurp the name and profession of a Christian. The preparation which such an one ought to make should be, to cry earnestly to God for pardon and forgiveness, and to take up a sincere resolution of amendment, not only by immediately forsaking his sins, but also by endeavouring to undo, as far as he reasonably can, the evil which he has done in the world, and to remedy the ill effects which his actions may have had upon others ; for without this he can have no well-grounded hopes of forgiveness.—But, on the other hand, if he finds that he has, in general, made it his endeavour to
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please God and live in the practice of his duty,---if his conscience accuses him of no great crimes and enormities, but such as he has repented of and forsaken,---if he finds in the examination of himself only some sudden starts of passion, some little undesigned slips and failures in his conduct, some hasty expressions or inadvertent thoughts, some want of constant warmth or attention in his devotions, or other such like instances of human frailty, from which even good men are not always free; such an one needs no long and formal preparation, but is constantly and habitually in readiness,---not always alike perhaps, yet always sufficiently prepared.

Quest. You have shewn at large of how great use divine worship is towards our leading a good and virtuous life, yet I suppose this is not the whole of what is requisite, but that other means may be usefully added. Though I must call upon God for help, and be thankful when I receive it, yet must I join to them my own endeavours. I should be glad therefore to know what course will be properest for me to take, in order to acquit myself worthily of those obligations which I have entered into, and to enable me to lead a life suitable to my profession.

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Answ.

Answ. Though this may be in great measure collected from what has already been said, yet I will endeavour to give you in one view such directions as, if sincerely and diligently followed, will be sufficient to bring you to the point you aim at.—It will be requisite, in the first place, that you gain to yourself just and true notions and opinions, that you make *a right judgment in all things*. False notions, like deceitful lights, will lead you out of the way, and cause you to stumble upon manifold dangers. When men suffer their opinions of temporal things to rise too high,—when they look upon pomp, elegance and distinction as the greatest and most valuable attainments,—when they account riches and honours or the tumultuous joys of sense the only desirable pursuits; what can we expect but that they will be carried away from more noble designs, by these things, which they falsely esteem above them. Whereas, on the contrary, when we have just and right conceptions of what is valuable, decent and praise-worthy, we shall be in less danger of departing from it, to follow those things which endeavour to cheat us with false and delusive hopes. Our judgment is our guide; if that direct us right, we may hope to travel in safety, but if our guide himself be blind, what better can

can we look for than to fall both of us into the ditch? If then we would act as we ought, we should endeavour to think as we ought; carefully to cultivate our minds, and improve ourselves in religious knowledge, that we may not wander in the dark, or be led aside into the devious paths of error and folly.

However, it is not sufficient that we judge truly of things, and know what is right and proper to be chosen, unless we have also a Will to chuse it. Here then lies the great difficulty, how to bend this iron sinew, and bring it to a compliance with what is just and right. And this will be most effectually done, as I have shewn before, by bringing those right judgments, which we have made of things, frequently into view, and contemplating earnestly and steadfastly with ourselves the beauty, the excellence, the advantage of these things; and on the other hand, the ingratitude, the deformity, the infelicity of the contrary. It will be impossible for us to view things constantly and attentively in a lovely and advantageous light, without being pleased with them, and contracting a fondness for them; nor can we look upon any thing as deformed and disadvantageous, without some degree of detestation

testation and abhorrence. And what we are pleased with we shall be apt to pursue, or what is distasteful to us we shall be as ready to avoid. So that if we are minded to gain the consent of the Will, we must retire frequently by ourselves, and be busied in this most important work.

It will be farther necessary for us, to have regard to those truths especially, which we are likely to have the most occasion for. Every man has his peculiar temptations, one of this sort perhaps, another of that; to guard against which, some considerations may be of more use and benefit than others. These ought therefore to be more especially regarded by us, and more frequently brought into view. By this we may be better prepared, and more able to resist them, when they come to attack us. However well we may think of ourselves, we can never be too sufficiently secured against danger. Every wise commander will provide in a peculiar manner for the defence of that quarter, where he expects the assault will be made. It will be our wisdom also to look out, and see where we are in greatest danger of being beset, and habituate to our mind those considerations, which we are most likely to stand in need of, for the securing of our conduct.

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Nay, it will be highly proper for us, as far as may be, to keep out of the way of every temptation, and run ourselves into no unnecessary dangers. We should look upon them as batteries placed against the bulwark of our virtue, every discharge of which tends to shake and weaken it something, till at last the breach is made, and the city broken through. Some hazard we run, some danger there is in every temptation; and what wise man would suffer himself to stand liable to danger, when it is in his power to avoid it? Nay, to do this is to tempt God, who may therefore most equitably give us up to the consequences of our own presumption and folly, and suffer us to fall under those difficulties, from which, if we would, we might have continued free.

Above all, we are concerned diligently and earnestly to request the assistance of God, without whose help all our endeavours are nothing worth. Our enemies are so much an overmatch for us, masters of such superior art and cunning, and our own weaknesses so many and so great, that it would be with the utmost difficulty that we could sustain ourselves, were not his arm in secret to fight for us, and did not his strength uphold us.

Quest. Will you give me leave now to recollect the substance of what we have been talking over, which in short I take to be this. That when God first created man, and sent him into the world, he made a covenant with him for strict obedience to his laws, which was the first Covenant. This he unhappily broke, and incurred the penalty affixed to the transgression, that is, the destruction of the sinner. God, of his infinite mercy and compassion, not willing to take the advantage against him, which he had so justly given, established with him a second or better covenant, more condescending and suitable to his weakness; the conditions of which were, Repentance of all his past sins,—Faith in Christ as our Saviour and law-giver,—and actual Obedience to those laws which he has established for us. All which things have been already explained, and that method pointed out by which we may best acquit ourselves of those obligations, which we have entered into. Let me now enquire whether there be any thing remaining, which may be usefully added to what has been already said, in order to our farther benefit and information?

Ans. I can think of nothing farther, unless it be to add a few arguments to persuade

suade men instantly to set about this so necessary work, and not drive it off from time to time, till the season of doing it be past and gone. Notwithstanding the reasonableness of the work itself, notwithstanding the great advantages which arise to us from the performance of it, and the solemn obligations we have laid ourselves under to do so; yet men are apt to be extremely negligent, and desirous to put it off till some future season. There are but few, I believe, who intend finally to disregard it, but are desirous only to gratify their sinful appetites a little longer, and to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; before they bid them a final adieu, and betake themselves to what they call a course of harsh austerity, mortification and self-denial. Such persons would do well to consider the difficulty of the work which lies on their hands, and the shortness of the time allotted them for the performance of it. Truth has always been accounted difficult to find: it cannot be attained without much labour and study. And though religious truths may be plainer, and lie more level to the capacities of all men than some others do; yet will it require some pains to become acquainted even with these. We are not to expect to arrive at just conceptions of things, or a sufficient knowledge of our duty,

duty, without expending some degree of industry, and that not inconsiderable. Nor can a man be said to have acquitted himself as he ought to do, who has not been diligent, and made as much improvement as his capacity and circumstances would permit him to do.——But if it be thus difficult to rectify the head, how much more so will it be to regulate the heart? It will require great mortification and self-denial, many a painful and severe conflict, before we can subdue our appetites and passions; before we can implant in ourselves strong habits of virtue, and bring our Will to a ready compliance with Reason.

And if from the greatness of the work we turn our eyes upon the time we have to do it in, we shall find it to be but very short. *Man that is born of a woman*, we are told, *hath but a short time to live; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.* And yet, short as this time is, various are the accidents that may cut it shorter, various are the occasions which call for no small share of it. How careful therefore ought we to be in the improvement of that portion of it which falls to our share! The traveller, who has a long journey to go, and but little time to perform it in, should make the most of every

every moment, and not trifle or loiter by the way. Let us therefore work the work of him that sent us while it is day, the night is coming which must put a final period to all our endeavours; and then where are all those purposes, all those our resolutions of amendment for the time to come? They should consider also, that the longer they defer setting about this their work, the more difficult will it grow. While men have stepped but a little way out of the ways of virtue, their return may be more easily accomplished: but after they have for some time gone astray, and made any considerable progress in iniquity, there they will find their task to be greatly encreased. The more evil they continue to do in the world, the more difficult and troublesome will it be to undo it again. The stronger they suffer their passions and evil habits to grow, the greater pains will it require to regulate and subdue them. The farther the mind is alienated from virtue, the harder will it prove to bring it back and reconcile them. What folly then is it for a man to wish to continue even a little longer in his sins! seeing this is only to multiply his work, and render that, which is hard enough already, a great deal harder. The present is undoubtedly the easiest time for us to begin in; so that if a man values his own ease and
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is willing to spare himself much labour and pains,—if he would be freed from many severe conflicts, and not reduced to the necessity of chastising his soul with greater bitterness and severity than he would otherwise have been obliged to do, let him avail himself of the present opportunity and begin immediately. If the difficulty is now so great that he can scarce persuade himself to set about it, is it likely that he will be more ready, when that difficulty becomes greater? If he at present totters under it, can it be expected that he should be better able to support it, when he has added to the weight and made it heavier?

They should consider likewise the real value of those things for which they desire to defer it; how little they make for their true interest, and how void they are of that pleasure and satisfaction, which they seem to promise. Every worldly enjoyment, which has been carried beyond the bounds of reason and virtue, however we may at present please ourselves in it, shall yet serve only to vex our heart and embitter our condition. When we come to a right mind, and to have a sincere love and affection for virtue (and sad indeed will be our case if we have not) then we shall loathe every pleasure, which has been contrary to it, and
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look upon our having succeeded in it as our greatest misfortune. Let us stop a little therefore in our career, and consider what we are doing. Let us not be pleased with treasuring up for ourselves shame and anxiety, nor be busied now in pulling down that fabric of our happiness, which we shall then wish we had been so wise as to have built up. They should consider moreover those degrees of happiness and glory which by their continuance in evil they deprive themselves of. Every day which we disregard, is a degree of perfection lost, to which otherwise we might have attained. Every hour we misuse debases us, and assigns us a lower station in those mansions of bliss, than what we otherwise should have enjoyed. As there are many mansions in the kingdom of our Father, it is a laudable ambition in us to aspire after the highest and best. Virtue is never at a stand, but there is room for eternal improvement in all those who diligently cultivate it; and according to our increase in virtue, such also shall be our increase in that happiness which is to reward it. Every moment therefore which we lose is lost to us irretrievably, nor can our most eager diligence afterwards render us so well approved by our master, as we might and should have been, had we added to it those improvements, which we might have

have made during the time of our neglect. In short, as God has been very favourable towards us, and granted us an exceeding gracious covenant, let it be our care to comply with it, and not by an evil and corrupt life despise his favours and disgrace our profession. — Let it be our business to cultivate in our minds just and honourable sentiments of the divine perfections, and to demean ourselves towards him with the most ardent love and humblest adoration. — Let us, in all our converse with our fellow creatures, act towards them, not only with the strictest regard to justice and equity, but also with the most tender and affectionate care and benevolence, with the most generous condescension to the weakness of others. And let it be our study to make the being of all around us as comfortable and happy as in reason we can. And, in order to this, let us endeavour to mortify in ourselves every inordinate and unruly passion and appetite, to correct every turbulent and injurious principle, and train ourselves up in the habitual exercise of every virtuous and amiable qualification. Let us not be diverted from these things by the pleasures and enjoyments of the present life; let these be tasted by us with decency and moderation only, so as to make them subservient to better purposes, —

purposes,--- not to suffer our hearts to be entirely taken up with them, nor our affections deeply engaged in them; remembering that there must come a time wherein this gay scene of things shall be finally closed, and all that we now esteem great and excellent in it, shall be beheld in another view;---wherein our honours shall fade, our pleasures shall vanish, and our possessions themselves shall make to them wings and fly away,---wherein dress and rank and elegance, with all the boasted accomplishments of a vain and luxurious age, shall be no more regarded; and no other distinction shall remain amongst mankind, but that most important one of good and bad.

We are sent into this world to fit and prepare ourselves for this time,—a time which is to decide the fate of every one of us as to happiness or misery. If we act contrary to the design of our being sent hither, and, disregarding those opportunities which are graciously afforded us, give ourselves up to the gratification of sense and appetite, how can we complain if we are doomed to feel the dismal effects of our folly?—But, on the contrary, if we are found to have used well this season of our trial, and, neglecting vain accomplishments, to have cultivated in ourselves proper dispositions of mind, we shall

shall then be translated from a transitory state
of care and trouble here, into a more happy
one of life and immortality hereafter.

End of the EXPLICATION.




S E R M O N I.

Abuse of Knowledge punish'd with
Blindness.

R O M. i. 21.

Because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.

 S light is necessary to guide our steps, and prevent us from that wandering to which a man is liable who walketh in darkness; so knowledge and understanding, in matters of religion especially, are the best directors to a right practice,—the very fountain and spring-head from whence all our virtue must flow. But then, how much our rational faculties, by which we gain or preserve such knowledge, are apt to be influenced by the temper and disposition of our mind, may easily be learned, both from the testimony
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of Scripture, and from experience. A virtuous disposition is the best help to a right understanding of true religion. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*; that is, the first principle and foundation of it. And thus the Psalmist, *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.*—On the contrary, the practice of wickedness blinds men's eyes, and perverts their judgments. It takes from them their discerning faculties, and causes that knowledge to degenerate into folly, the force of whose dictates are not sufficient to incline them to a compliance with it.

A melancholy instance of this truth the Apostle gives us in the chapter before us; where he says, that the Gentiles, though they had not that perfect knowledge of God and his will which we have now imparted to us, —though they wanted many of those advantages which we at this time so happily enjoy, yet, for their neglect of what they had, which were sufficient to have informed and persuaded them better, —for their refusing to live according to them, fell into a gross ignorance of divine things, *became vain in their imaginations*, or their reasonings about him, *and their foolish heart was darkened*; and although they *thought themselves wise*, yet they *became fools*, and, in consequence of that folly, fell into the greatest absurdities and

and extravagance, in all that long train of vices which the Apostle there enumerates.

Thus then, by an evil and corrupt life, is the image of God in great measure defaced in us, and the knowledge of his religion decayed:—Thus, by being long deaf to the dictates and persuasions of our reason, that reason comes to lose it's force, and to be impaired in it's exercise, and we not only hindered from making any farther advancement in the knowledge of our duty, but obliged also to go backwards, unable to maintain even what we have. *We grow vain in our imaginations, and our foolish heart becomes darkened.*

I shall endeavour farther to illustrate this truth under these two propositions,

I. That God has afforded men sufficient means for the knowledge of their duty.

II. That, notwithstanding this, an evil and corrupt life is a bar to our knowledge, and a cloud to our understanding.

FIRST, That God has afforded men sufficient means for the knowledge of their duty, no one can doubt, who considers either the justice or the goodness of the divine Being; for nothing can be conceived

more unjust or unreasonable, than that God should have required at our hands the performance of certain duties, and at the same time refuse to inform us what those duties are, or to direct us to the ways and methods by which we are to perform them.—Nor indeed can goodness itself place a man in a situation, in which he shall be more likely to mistake his happiness than to pursue it properly. So far indeed as a man wilfully disobeys a known law, so far he is chargeable with the guilt of transgressing it: but unavoidable ignorance can be no crime. Sin is not imputed where there is no law, or, which is the same thing, where the law cannot be known, or is not made sufficiently manifest. Accordingly, God has represented himself in Scripture, as *having no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*, but, on the contrary, that *he would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*.

But when I say, that God has given us sufficient means for the knowledge of our duty, I must not be understood to mean, that he has put it in our power to distinguish accurately in all cases the exact boundaries between vice and virtue, or to mark out precisely the limits of each. If a man's inquiry be, how far he may lawfully and innocently go in the gratification of such an appetite,

appetite, or the enjoyment of such a pleasure, before the next step shall carry him into sin;—if he wishes to know, how much liberty he may take, or how near approach to the breach of his Maker's commandment, when he might have continued safe in the practice of virtue: it is his own fault if he should happen to mistake, as it is very likely he will,—if he should call evil good and good evil,—if in his reasonings about them he be subject to error, and thus become *vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart be darkened*. God, in fixing every man's duty, has not proposed a bare abstinence from evil, but has commanded us to endeavour after perfection,—to press forward towards the high prize of our calling. It is but of little use therefore for a man to enquire, how he may keep clear of vice only; he should endeavour to know how he may improve in virtue. Accordingly God has made the exact boundaries of virtue and vice difficult to be ascertained, that we might not be tempted to venture near them, but keep ourselves at as great a distance as we are able. We are in this case like a man travelling near a precipice;—his road is plain, and he may pass safe enough, whilst he keeps at a proper distance; but if, either through curiosity or wantonness, he leave the safe way to walk upon the verge, the

fault is in himself if he chance to stumble, when at the same time he might have travelled in security.

As it is not necessary that we should be able to distinguish the exact boundaries between virtue and vice, much less necessary is it, that we should have a knowledge of the more curious and speculative parts of religion. If such be our inquiry, no wonder if we only weary ourselves in vanity. To study the works of God, in order to admire and adore his wisdom and goodness, —to search out the great truths of religion, with intent to confirm our faith and encourage our practice, is an employment worthy our faculties, and acceptable to God: for *the works of the Lord*, we are told, are *great*, worthy to be *sought out of all them that have pleasure therein*. But then, we should remember, that some truths are of so abstruse a nature as to elude all our searches, and exceed the utmost reach of our faculties. Others, though attainable in themselves, God has for good reasons seen fit to withhold from us; while others he has revealed to us but in part. And therefore it is no wonder if we be lost and bewildered in our inquiries into them; if all around us be thick darkness. God has given us as much knowledge as is proper for our state and condition here; in vain therefore

therefore do we desire to be wise above what is written. Should God condescend to gratify our curiosity, and grant us a knowledge of these mysterious truths, of what real benefit would they be to us, or of what service to religion in general?—To instance in particulars.—If we will not accept and comply with those conditions of salvation which God has offered us by his Son, and which we so much stand in need of; should we accept them readier, if we understood the nature of that divine Messenger, or could discover how he derived his being from the Father?—Are the tenders of divine Grace less useful, or our sin in abusing them less flagrant, because we are not able to discern the particular ways and methods by which the holy Spirit influences the hearts of men?—If the joys of Heaven or the punishments of Hell will not work upon us and restrain us from evil; neither is it to be expected they would do so, could we discover the nature of those joys or the substance of those torments. Nor is such knowledge useless only, but also highly unprofitable. *Knowledge*, saith the Apostle, (that is, such a knowledge as this) *puffeth up*. It engages men in violent disputes and indecent heats about religion, throws them into parties and factions, and takes them off from the essentials of religion.

religion. So that God has wisely hid these things from us, and made the knowledge of them unattainable, that he might teach us humility and charity, and that we might be more at leisure for the practice of those things which we do know, the greater and *weightier matters of the law, Justice, Mercy and Truth.*

Nay, in matters of practice, it is not to be expected that all, even good men, should be alike free from error. In things indeed absolutely necessary to our happiness, we shall, if it be not our own fault, be secured from mistake; but then, there are other truths in religion, which, though not absolutely requisite to our final welfare, are yet useful, convenient, and perfective of our practice, for the attainment of which God has given men very different capacities and opportunities. To some he has given great and exalted understandings; some are able to discover and see clearly into truths, which others, by reason of the natural weakness of their parts, must remain ignorant of;—some have more and better means of information than others have, and therefore their improvements may be accordingly. But then we are to take notice, that God hath not required the same things from all, but made their duty proportionable to their abilities. Accordingly, where men are under

der a natural incapacity, or not yet come to the use of their reason, or innocently deprived of it, as is the case of Idiots or Children, or many times of Lunaticks; there is no duty at all required: for as God has not given them the means, so he requires not the improvement of them. In the earlier ages of the world also, when men had only their natural unassisted reason to direct them, their duty went no farther than that was able to carry them, and a practice conformable to it was the whole of what was required. But now, under the Gospel, as our light is greater, so our duty and obligations are increased with it. And even here the like is not required from all. Some, as we before observed, have had ten talents committed to them; from these more is due than from those to whom only one has been given. So that no man is answerable for that degree of light and information, which it has pleased God to give him; but only for his conformity and obedience to it.

Nor indeed can we be sure that God will give us the knowledge even of necessary things, unless we make use of proper helps and proportionable industry. For though he has made every man's duty in proportion to his capacity, yet are we answerable in great measure even for our capacity itself,

self, which may be greatly enlarged by use and exercise, and, on the other hand, will suffer by neglect. It is thus in every art and science. Propose to a beginner any of it's most important truths, and they will exceed his capacity; nor will his understanding be able to comprehend them, until he has been for some time exercised in that art or science, and brought on gradually to a more intimate acquaintance with it. It is the same with respect to the great truths of religion, which a man cannot at first comprehend, without being acquainted with the plainer doctrines and intermediate duties. It is therefore our duty to use such diligence in our inquiry into spiritual things as is consistent with our other affairs, and such as we generally use upon things which we highly value and esteem. It will be but a bad excuse to say, We have done according to the best of our knowledge; if it be our own fault that we did not know better; or if we have been careless and negligent in seasoning our minds with those truths which were necessary for the performance of our duty. And as God has required, that we should make the best use of our capacity; so has he likewise directed, that we should not neglect those helps and assistances which he has graciously provided. If we refuse these, we are justly

justly blameable; and as justly may our ignorance be imputed to ourselves. If, when he has given us his law which is able to make us wise unto salvation, we will not search diligently into it; if we will not allow a reasonable portion of time from our pleasures, our business, or any other avocations, for the information of our minds and to get a true knowledge of our duty; we may yet sit in darkness amidst the clearest light, and continue under the shadow of death, while life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.

Again, That which a man's own reason does not enable him to comprehend, may easily be made known to him by the assistance of others, whom God has endowed with greater abilities and opportunities. Hence appears the necessity of teachers, and the great obligation men are under to put themselves in the way of information, and to hearken to instruction. When therefore we affirm, that God has given men capacities sufficient for the knowledge of their duty, we do not mean, that they may attain it of themselves always, without the use of industry or proper helps; but that, by the assistance of these, where needful, they shall be enabled to arrive at the knowledge of whatsoever is necessary.

Thus has God laid open to us the way
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to knowledge, but still we may render what he has done ineffectual,—we may block up that way, and remain in ignorance,—we may become vain in our imaginations, and our foolish heart may be darkened.

But this brings me to my

SECOND proposition, That an evil and corrupt life perverts the understanding, and hinders us in the knowledge of our duty.

And 1st. A wicked life hinders a man in the exercise of those powers and faculties which are necessary for the attainment of religious knowledge. Truth does not lie upon the surface, but we must dig deep and search for it as for hidden treasures; we must employ all our faculties if we mean to find it. But then, a vicious life is a great impediment to a man in this work. It fills his mind with passions and desires of a nature quite contrary to religion; his thoughts are taken up by the cares and pleasures of this present life, and contriving for the satisfaction of his ambitious, his sensual, or his avaricious designs; so that there is no probability for reason and religion to find any place in them. His mind is like a tenement already occupied, which has no room for the entertainment of any other inhabitant. Therefore let a man's powers

powers and abilities be what they will, yet in this case they are likely to prove but of little service to him, if, when he should be making use of them, he finds it extremely difficult if not impossible to do so. — Or could we suppose that under such circumstances he could, through strength of natural parts, gain a tolerable knowledge in religion; yet these things must be a great disadvantage to him, and hinder him from making so great a progress as he might otherwise have done. Thus then does a wicked life fetter the mind, and hinder it from making a due use of those powers and abilities which are given to it; so that, although we have eyes, yet do we not see; though we have ears, yet do we not hear, neither understand with our heart that we may be converted and healed.

2dly. If a vicious life were no impediment to our consideration, but would leave a man at liberty to prosecute his religious inquiries; still must he do it under greater disadvantages than he would find in a course of virtue. The good man is ever meditating on good things, *all the day long is his study in them*; whereas, on the other hand, the wicked man *hath not God in all his thoughts*, but *hath cast his words behind him*. It is but reasonable therefore to think, that

that a man's notions must be much clearer in those things which have frequently come under his view and consideration, than in matters which he has seldom, if at all, reflected on. A good man then brings with him clearer and juster notions of these things, and therefore is better fitted for the examination of them than the vicious and immoral can be; for clear and distinct ideas are a great help towards knowledge. But after all, there are some things of so practical a nature as not to be rightly understood without experience; such, for instance, as peace of conscience, the sweets of religion, with many others. These are things, the true notion of which must be had from a course of virtue, and cannot so well be obtained by the most lively imagination or the most accurate description. And when these are the subject of our inquiry, who is best fitted to decide rightly about them,—he who feels and experiences what they are, or he who gets what knowledge he has of them by some other means?

3dly. But supposing a wicked life would permit us to turn our thoughts towards these things, and also to have just notions of them; yet would it deprive us of that vigour and alacrity which ought to accompany our search. By a wicked life we should

should contract a fondness for our vices, and be destitute of that pleasure which a good man enjoys in a life of virtue; and the pleasure we take in any thing must be allowed to be no small advantage to us in our pursuit of it. It is a spur to our diligence, it fixes our attention more closely, enables us to dwell longer upon it and consider it more perfectly. On the contrary, when men dislike any thing, they go heavily about it, are soon tired and glad to lay it by, their faculties become jaded, and their proficiency in it is sure to be but small. 'Tis true a man may, through vanity or design, abandon that which is pleasant and entertaining, and pursue those things that are irksome and disagreeable to him. But even here the good man will still have the advantage; duty will act as forcibly upon him as vanity and interest can on the other; and then the pleasure of the study itself will always be an additional advantage. But these are cases that rarely happen;—men are seldom induced to depart from what is delightful to them; and any careful observer will find such instances very rare: but that it is much easier, as well as much more common, for men to go on in the road they are in,—for them still to remain vain in their imaginations,—for their foolish heart to be still darkened.

4thly.

4thly. Knowledge of our duty is the gift of God, and the improvement of it is reckoned among the fruits of the Spirit. But to what purpose should God bestow upon us this gift, if we by a wicked life pervert and abuse it? May we not with much more reason expect, that he will take from men that light by which they refuse to be directed, and leave them to stumble on in utter darkness? If a man refuse to guide his steps by it, with what reason can he expect this favour to be continued to him, which was given him for that purpose only? Why should he think, that God will continue those husbandmen in his vineyard who refuse to give him of the increase of it? or that he will permit his talents to remain in the hands of those servants who neglect to make a proper improvement of them? He who has rejected and refused to follow the truth, can have no reason to complain, if, as a punishment for his obstinacy and disobedience, God should give him up to the delusions of his own fancy (as he has assured us he will) *to believe a lie*; and because he would not walk honestly and uprightly whilst he had the light, the clear knowledge of God's will to direct him, should cloud his mind with a night of irrecoverable ignorance, and that light which was within him
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be thus extinguished and become darkness.

5thly. This likewise seems to be the natural consequence of a dissolute life. Truth, though possessed by the mind, will not always be retained. To be convinced of this, we need only to consider the numerous occurrences which by the treachery of our memory have now escaped us, and of which there remain no more traces than if they had never been. From hence we may conclude, that others of which the mind now is, or hereafter may be in possession, are likewise liable to the same fate; that they in their turn will also be forgotten, and, unless frequently renewed, will insensibly decay. Religious truths seem to be no more exempt from this than others; they require to be frequently revolved and renewed in the mind. But an evil life gives no opportunities for this, or at least not sufficient; but the unhappy man insensibly declines in the knowledge of his duty; these truths decay out of his mind, and are succeeded by a state of ignorance and error.

Since then God has furnished us with capacity sufficient for the knowledge of our duty, but that by an evil and corrupt life we may render it ineffectual, and put out

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the eyes of our understanding ; let us take diligent care to avoid so fatal a miscarriage, and endeavour to put that light which he has given us to it's proper use, in regulating our lives and reforming our manners. Let us consider, that the end of knowledge is practice ; without which it is of no value or esteem,—of no benefit or advantage to us. If this be wanting, knowledge degenerates into vain curiosity and idle speculation ; whereas, on the contrary, by a good and proper use of it we are enabled to do great things ;—we perform acceptable service to our Maker,—we promote the good and happiness of our fellow-creatures, and render ourselves a public blessing and advantage to mankind ; and more especially advance our own welfare and happiness, and procure to ourselves treasures which wax not old. But let us remember also, that if by an evil and corrupt life we put out this light of Heaven, then all these good effects and valuable advantages are grossly defeated, and in their room all the contrary evils and maladies succeed : for as knowledge enables a man to do much good, so will error drive him upon mischief ; and as truth is the parent of virtue, so is falsehood the mother of evil.

It should be our business therefore diligently and earnestly to endeavour after that knowledge

knowledge which God has put in our power, and to get a clear understanding of our duty; not to sit down contentedly in ignorance, or cry out with the Sluggard, *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber.* Are our capacities but mean? that is not our fault. Have we endeavoured to make the best use of them, such as they are, and to go as far as they will carry us?—Have our opportunities been few, and our leisure little? for this we are not answerable; but have we made the best use of them that we reasonably could, and improved those opportunities which we had to the greatest advantage? It will avail us little to plead, that we had not the parts and leisure which some had; the question that will be asked us is, what use we have made of those we had. God has given to all men one day in seven, and commanded, that laying aside the toils, the cares, the business of this world, we should turn our thoughts towards a better, and enquire out the way to it. And if we have but one, surely there is then good reason that we should make the best of that. The fewer we have, the more precious ought those opportunities to be, and the more careful should we be to use them well. And yet how frequently is even this squandered away in pleasure and diversion, in vanity and folly; as if the

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knowledge

knowledge of their duty and the way to future happiness were a thing of little or no concern to them. But most assuredly there will come a time when wisdom shall be justified of her children, and these men be made sadly sensible of their misconduct. Let us therefore be diligent in seasoning our minds with a due sense of religion, and getting a true understanding of our duty; and in order to this, let our practice keep pace with our knowledge. Neither of them can subsist without the other, but by neglecting one we are in danger of losing both. It was thus that God dealt with the unhappy Gentiles mentioned in my text, who, for not living up to the knowledge which they had, were given up to a reprobate or injudicious mind,—*became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* And if God suffered them, who had only the light of nature to direct them, to fall for the misuse of it into so grievous a state; what in reason can we expect who enjoy the superior advantages of the Gospel? If they were punished so severely who lay under many disadvantages in their way to goodness

ness and virtue, let every one of us lay our hand on our heart, and ask our own conscience these questions, What must we look for now these disadvantages are so happily removed? are not infatuation and darkness deservedly our portion, *even darkness that may be felt?* If, like the unprofitable servant in the Gospel, we put not the talents committed to our charge to their due and proper use, do we not deserve to have them taken from us and given to those who do?



and the Father, let every one of us lay our
 heart on our heart, and all our own con-
 science, that we may be able to give an
 account for now these things are to hap-
 pen, we must be able to give an account and
 be able to give an account of our position, even now.
 We must be able to give an account of all the things
 which are in the Gospel, we must not
 be able to give an account of our charge to them
 and we must be able to give an account of
 the things which are in the Gospel, we must not
 be able to give an account of our charge to them



S E R M O N II.

Of Christ's preaching to the Spirits in prison.

I P E T E R, iii. v. 19, 20.

By which also he went and preached unto the Spirits in prison;

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.

U P O N what particular occasion, or to what particular persons, this epistle was written, whether to the Jewish converts only, or to all the Christians of the lesser Asia, is not fully agreed; this however is certain, that at the time of writing it they were under very great trials and afflictions; trouble sat hard upon them: they had need therefore of some comfortable advice to preserve them

stedfast in the faith which they had embraced, and to raise their spirits under that melancholy state to which it had exposed them. Our Apostle, who had himself wofully experienced how liable human nature was to sink under trials, and how little even our best resolutions were to be depended on, and not forgetful perhaps of the command which he had received on that occasion, *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*, wrote this Epistle to exhort them to courage and stedfastness.

This he does by shewing them the advantages that would accrue to them from these sufferings, and then exhorts them to such carefulness and prudence in their behaviour, and to such an unblemished life and conversation, as would bring credit to that religion which they professed, and be most effectual in putting to silence the accusations of those men who were their accusers, and most probably their persecutors also:—That, if it should still be their fortune to meet with an ill return for so doing, they should remember, that it was better to suffer for doing good than evil,—as an innocent person than as a guilty malefactor:—That to encourage them herein they had the example of Christ himself, who suffered in the same manner, the just for the unjust; who though he was *put to death*

death in the flesh, yet was he again quickened by the Spirit; after which are added the words of my text, By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.

It shall be my business in the following discourse,

FIRST to endeavour to fix what I judge to be the true meaning of the words before us.

SECONDLY, to deduce from them some considerations which may have an useful influence on our practice.

FIRST, I shall endeavour to shew you the true meaning of the words, which, as they lie before us, are very ambiguous, and have been interpreted in very different senses. And here I shall not trouble you long with that sense which the Church of Rome has put upon them, which has endeavoured from hence to deduce her fanciful notion of Purgatory; nor yet with the opinion of some ancient Christian writers, That Christ at his descent into hell, or into the place of departed souls, preached there unto them
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the Gospel of Salvation. You are all of you sensible, that the actions of this life only are what are to be enquired into; that it is by them alone that we must stand or fall. Every man, we are told, is to be judged according to the things which he has done in the body, and that there is no work, no device in the grave, whither we are going. Such preaching therefore can be but of little use to the disobedient, as my text tells us those were to whom it was used, in a place where we have no opportunity of retrieving our past conduct, or setting right those errors which we have committed here.

But I shall proceed to examine those opinions which seem to be more weighty, and to carry in them a greater shew of reason.

1st. Some are of opinion, that the words in my text which are translated "spirits in prison," would be better rendered "spirits upon the watch," i. e. who are appointed by God to watch over and guard mankind. In this case the passage should run thus, "By which he went along with the spirits on the watch, and preached to those persons who were disobedient in the days of Noah." But as they bring no parallel expressions to support this

this interpretation, and as it does violence to the original by drawing it from it's easy and natural signification into one more forced and constrained, it is but reasonable to reject it, especially as the plain and natural one may be so easily reconciled.

Besides though Christ is sometimes represented as coming down from heaven, attended with a guard of Angels, yet in this case it cannot be, because he went not himself in person, but did it by means of the holy Spirit, whose more immediate office it seems in scripture to have been, to inspire the minds of the prophets and preachers of righteousness. *The holy men of old spake as they were moved by the holy Ghost.*

2dly. Others are of opinion, that by "spirits in prison" are meant wicked and irreligious men who are sometimes so called in scripture. Accordingly, Isaiah speaks of the preaching of the Gospel, as *bringing the prisoners out of prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.* And again, *The spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the prison-doors to those who are bound.* But if we attentively consider the words of my text, we shall find, that the Apostle does not seem to intend, under this phrase

phrase of "spirits in prison," to describe to us what sort or manner of persons they were, because he does that in the words immediately following, where he tells us they were disobedient or unbelieving, but rather that state or condition, that captivity to which they had subjected themselves by their wickedness and folly. And this, if we rightly attend to it, will be found most agreeable to the sense of Isaiah in the fore-mentioned places; where, by releasing the prisoners and opening the prison doors, he means, not so much the reclaiming wicked and impious men from sin, as delivering them from that which was the consequence of it, their captivity to sin and Satan, and that sentence of condemnation which they had thus subjected and rendered themselves liable to, and from which Christ is in other places said to have redeemed them, or set them free.

3dly. Others again suppose, that by spirits in prison are meant, not those who were so at the time of his preaching to them, but who were afterwards cast into it for their contempt and neglect of him; being, at the time of the Apostle's writing this Epistle, delivered into the custody of Death, and reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day. This meaning,

ing, though consistent enough with the words themselves, yet does not seem to be what the Apostle had in view in the passage before us. For as the Ark itself and the deliverance here wrought by it are both of them figurative, so is it but reasonable (if it fairly may be) to understand the other parts of it in the same manner also.

To make this farther evident, and give you what I judge to be the true meaning of these words, we must look back to the history to which the Apostle here refers, as it is related in the sixth Chapter of Genesis; where we find, that when wickedness had overspread the face of the earth, and the Sons of God, i. e. his children and true worshippers, the posterity of Seth, had fallen away and mixed themselves with the daughters of men, or the idolatrous race of Cain, God came at last to this resolution, *My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh*, (given up to carnal affections) *yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*

Whether we take the sense of the word spirit, in the beginning of this speech, for the life of man, and translate it as the seventy have done thus, "My spirit" (i. e. the breath which I have breathed into him, and by which he is become a living soul) "shall not always abide in man"; or whether

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we make it to mean the spirit of God, that it shall not always strive, always be preaching to or persuading men, as the vulgar Latin has rendered it, yet thus much is certain, that these words contain in them a sentence of condemnation pronounced against mankind; that though God would not let his spirit always strive with man, yet he would allow him an hundred and twenty years: so long he would wait for his amendment, before he brought a flood of waters upon the earth, and destroyed entirely that untoward generation.

Now men in such a situation as this may very justly be term'd spirits or persons in prison, they lying under sentence of condemnation, doom'd to and reserved for punishment, which (unless they repented) was within such a time to be executed upon them. So that the meaning of the passage will in short be this; That the Ark formerly saved those eight persons who entered into it from the flood, under sentence of which mankind then lay as condemned prisoners, just in the same manner as baptism does now save those who submit to it, from the wrath of God and the curse of sin, under which the guilty world remain concluded.

This will be still more evident from the words of Isaiah before quoted; where the prisoners

soners are not persons in custody of death, but under sentence of condemnation, and that curse from which Christ, at their baptism or admission into his church, did set them free. Agreeably to which the Apostle St. Paul (Gal. iii. 22, 23,) represents all men both Jews and Gentiles shut up as prisoners condemned by law to death, the punishment of sin, till faith in Christ came, by which we obtain a happy deliverance. *The scripture hath concluded* (or shut up, as the word should have been translated) *all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.* And again, *We are shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

This I think to be the true natural and easy interpretation of the words before us, as well as most agreeable to the Apostle's reasoning in this place; making that imprisonment or sentence of condemnation from which Noah was delivered in the Ark, a type of that from which we are all now delivered by baptism. But because there are some slight objections which may seem to make against this interpretation, it may not be improper, before I dismiss this subject, briefly to consider them.

Some have thought, that because they are here term'd spirits, they must be persons not in the body. But for a confutation of this,

this, they need go no farther than the text itself, where they may see a word, of much the same signification with this, used for persons who most undoubtedly were in the body, of whom it is said, that few, i. e. eight SOULS were saved by water.

Others, in order to overthrow this interpretation, have objected to these words, *Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years*, as containing, not a sentence of condemnation or a denunciation of the flood, but only a resolution taken by God for the shortening of man's life; that whereas before they lived much longer, from hence forward they should not exceed this term. But this objection is not at all consistent with truth, we having several instances afterwards of men who far exceeded this term. The Patriarchs immediately after the flood lived to three, to four hundred years. As low down as Abraham, he lived to 175, Isaac still longer, to 180, Jehoiada, who was near fifteen hundred years after the flood, lived to a hundred and thirty years: so that this cannot possibly be the meaning of the words before us.

But the greatest objection is, that this denunciation is made after the birth of Shem, who, as we learn from Chap. v. was not quite a hundred years old when the flood came. How then is it possible, that
God

God should grant the term of 120 years, and yet (if this is to be understood of the flood) destroy them in less than a hundred? —To this some of the Fathers have returned for answer, that God shortened the time on account of the more than ordinary increase of wickedness among mankind. But God, when he fixed this time, knew what would happen, and what would be necessary to be done, and therefore would not promise them a longer time than he intended to grant; for he is a Being slow to anger, and more apt to delay than to hasten his judgments.—The truth of the case rather seems to be this; that this denunciation was made before the birth of Shem, though by the historian it is not mentioned till after it; it being no unusual thing in Scripture, as well as in other authors, to relate some things, not in the exact order in which they came to pass, but in such as they judged most convenient. As for instance, the confusion of tongues and the cause of it is related after the generations of Noah and his Sons, though in truth it happened before several of them were born. But Moses being desirous to give us the Genealogy at one view, and unwilling to break the thread of it, as he must have done had he inserted this event according to the time in which it happened,

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wisely reserved the account of it till the next Chapter. So here also giving us a list of the Generations from Adam to the flood, he must have broken them off in the midst by the insertion of the passage before us, had he not deferred the mention of it to a more convenient place. I might farther confirm this by many other instances in Scripture. Thus the calling of Abraham as we learn from Act. viii. 2, 3, was before he left his own country or departed from Ur of the Chaldeans, tho' it is not mentioned by Moses till after the death of Nahor and his leaving Haran: but in a thing so well known I need produce no more.

Having thus shewn you the sense of these words in my text, and run through the most considerable objections against it, I come now

SECONDLY, to lay before you some considerations which may have an useful influence on your practice.

And 1st, When we read the passage before us, we should not consider it as a bare historical relation, designed for the amusement of a leisure hour, or to afford us matter of speculation only, but as a thing intended for the use and benefit of all succeeding ages, and *written for our admonition upon*

upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

We should endeavour to draw from it an instructive lesson, and look upon it as a warning given to ourselves. We have not done our duty till we have made this use of it, and, from our reflections on their unhappy conduct, improved and amended our own. They lived a life of jollity and merriment, were careless in their behaviour and thoughtless as to the event of it; their hearts were fixed and their minds intent upon their interest, their pleasure, or perhaps their ambitious views; to these they gave themselves up;—their maxim was to enjoy the present season, and cast away the thought of what was to happen on the morrow;—*they ate, they drank, we are told, they bought, they sold, they married and were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*—Has not our conduct too nearly resembled theirs? Have not we, like them, given ourselves up to pleasure, walked every one in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes, without so much as once thinking, that for all these things God will bring us to judgment? Have not we consumed those hours in vanity and folly, some of which at least ought to have been employed for the emolument of our mind and the improvement of our

morals? Have not we, as they did, followed after luxury and intemperance, or yielded ourselves up to rioting and drunkenness, to chambering and wantonness? Have not we, in imitation of them, hunted after profit and advantage, endeavouring to oppress, to defraud, or to overreach one another; looking every man for his gain from his quarter, even selling ourselves, as it were, to do wickedly? We should thus examine our hearts, and endeavour to profit by their misfortunes. We are apt enough to condemn those wicked men, and to think that God dealt justly with them; but let us not account it enough, till we have carried our reflections a little farther, and considered with ourselves, whether we have not provoked the divine majesty as well as they,—whether we have not continued unfruitful under all the means and opportunities of improvement,—whether we have not obstinately held out against his calls, and resisted all the friendly admonitions and motions of his Spirit. They, 'tis true, had the preaching of Noah to warn them of these things, and to point out that judgment that was coming upon them, and therefore were deservedly punished for their neglect and disregard of it. If the manner of our chastisement has not been so clearly revealed to us, yet thus much in general
has

has been manifested to us, that the works of sin are unfruitful works, and that misery and unhappiness are in all it's ways : And this in a higher and more remarkable manner than it was to them. God indeed in those early times spake to them by his prophets, but in these last days he hath spoken to us by his Son. We ought therefore, as the Apostle infers, to *give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip* ; and to remember, that if the behaviour of those husbandmen was so displeasing to their Lord, who rejected the message delivered by servants only, how much worse shall our's be, if we disregard and despise the Heir.

2dly. As the passage before us gives us an instance of the severity, so does it also of the clemency of God. We may from hence learn, how very loth he is to bring mischiefs and evils upon his creatures ; he bore long with those wicked men, and suffered their iniquities while there was a probability of their amendment ; he tried every reasonable method that could be used for their reformation ; and when nothing would do, still he waited long before he put his threatnings in execution, and deferred his vengeance for the space of an hundred and twenty years. But yet, though God is thus merciful, we should take heed how

we suffer ourselves to presume upon it. It is too sad a truth, as well as too common in the world, that men are apt, from this patience of God, to take courage and confidence and sin with a higher hand; and because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore to have their heart fully set in them to do evil. They are apt to put it off in the language of the Psalmist, *Tush, the Lord shall not see it, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it*;—or perhaps insolently to ask the question, *Is there knowledge in the Most High?*—Yes he does know and will regard it too, and however willing men may be to set the evil day at a distance from them, yet let them be well assured of this, that their judgment lingereth not, their damnation slumbereth not; but that there shall come a time when his mercy to them shall have an end, and their sins shall have turned that God who is all compassion into a consuming fire, and even patience itself, by being abused, shall heat the furnace of his wrath one seven times hotter for them than it would otherwise have been. God indeed is as merciful to his creatures as he possibly can be, or rather, as they themselves will let him be; accordingly, he is represented in Scripture as slow to anger, and grieving for the mischiefs which they bring upon themselves.

selves. *Why will ye die, O house of Israel?* and again, *How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim, or how shall I deliver thee, O Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah, or how shall I set thee as Zeboim?* My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. But then we should remember, that this his mercy was not intended to destroy order and good government in the world, or for an encouragement for men to go on in their sins; but rather to incline them to break them off by repentance. Had not God some salutary ends in view by deferring his vengeance, it is most probable that he would execute it immediately. Let us take care how we defeat them; for we cannot expect that God should continue to exercise his mercy to no purpose. This probably was the mistake of those men of whom I have been speaking. They could not believe, that God would be so unmerciful as to destroy a whole world of his creatures; and thought, that he might as well have left them unmade, as put a period to them so soon after their production. They could not be persuaded that he would deal so hardly with them, for the gratification of those appetites and passions which they received from him; or that he would so severely punish them, for complying with that weakness which

he himself had created them with, and made as it were a part of their nature. Such possibly were the arguments with which they deceived themselves, and laughed at the folly, as they thought it, or the madness of the preacher. Let us be wiser and argue better, lest the vengeance of God should stop our mouths, as it did theirs, and put an end to our lives and our reasonings together,

3dly. This should teach us to look up to him from whom these punishments come, and to tremble and be afraid before the God of heaven, for as much as we are all sinners, and justly liable to the like condemnation. God, out of his infinite wisdom, in order that he may spare some and induce them to take warning, is now contented with selecting a few only for examples to the rest; but who may be pick'd out for this end we cannot tell: it is not always the greatest sinner, but such as he sees will best suit the purpose which he has in view. It should be our care therefore to recommend ourselves to his favour, and by a sober and obedient behaviour to secure ourselves from those misfortunes which may otherwise befall us. It may be we have not yet been singled out; let us bless God for it, and be thankful that he has not dealt with us according

according to our deserts, and let us study to make the best use of what has happened to others, and endeavour to profit by their experience. The best way of keeping judgments at a distance from ourselves is to make the consideration of them effectual to the purpose which they are intended to promote; for we know not but that, while we are grieving and provoking him, he may select us out for vengeance, or while we are thoughtless and inconsiderate, punishment may overtake us: so that while we say to ourselves peace and security, sudden destruction shall come upon us, or, while the meat and drink is yet in our mouths, the heavy wrath of God shall smite us down, as it did heretofore the chosen men in Israel. Or if it should please God to let us pass through this life without any distinguishing marks of his displeasure, yet we should remember that there is another life hereafter, where all impenitent and ungodly men shall meet with that vengeance which they have escaped here, and find, that their sentence is respited only for a time, in order to fall the heavier hereafter; and however they may flatter themselves at present, that it shall most undoubtedly be executed on them, at that day wherein *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt*

melt with fervent heat ;— wherein the wicked shall be turned into bell, and all the people who forget God.

Consider what hath been said, and the Lord give you a right understanding in all things.




S E R M O N III.

Knowledge of the Gospel the truest
freedom.

J O H N viii. 32.

*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free.*

 H E perception of truth is the great privilege of our nature. It is this which distinguishes us from the brutes,—which restrains and regulates the passions of our animal frame, and prevents our being enslaved to instinct. It is this in which we resemble our Creator, and are nearly allied to heaven,—which points out to us the source of true pleasure, and prevents our mistaking those things for our happiness, which, upon mature deliberation, will be attended with turbulent and disquieting reflections. Highly laudable therefore must be our search after it, nay, we are under the strongest ties to cultivate
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and improve it in our mind. The very capacity which God has given us to attain it (were there no other arguments) bespeaks as much ; unless we can suppose the design of God in giving us valuable gifts was to have them lie neglected and unemployed ; that it is equally pleasing to him whether we debase, or whether we exalt and improve our nature ; whether we support becomingly that rank and dignity which he has placed us in, or whether we disparage and disgrace it.——We may indeed launch out into vain and frivolous inquiries, and pursue such things as are of no great importance to us to know ; or we may attempt truths above our capacities, and to which our faculties are altogether unequal : but while we confine ourselves to those that are within our reach, to such as tend to regulate our conduct, such as recommend to our esteem our real interest, and teach us to distinguish it from specious and delusive appearances, we cannot be better employed, nor will any thing more successfully reward our diligence. It shall free us from all that littleness and narrowness of mind which are the inseparable companions of error and superstition ; it shall enlarge our conceptions and give a wider scope to our activity——*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*

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From these words of the Apostle I shall take occasion to consider,

FIRST, What is meant by the truth, and the great mischiefs that have arisen from the want of it.

SECONDLY, In what sense it may be said to make us free.

FIRST then, what is meant by truth. This is the question which Pilate asked of of Christ, *What is truth?* and whether he meant it seriously or not, yet a very important one it is. The want of it hath been attended with the greatest mischiefs imaginable, and almost always proved fatal to the cause of virtue. Men's principles have usually a very great influence upon their conduct, and, be they true or false, are very vigorous motives whilst we think them to be true.—And as corrupt and mistaken principles will be thus pernicious in any case, so are they more especially hurtful in religion, as that is a thing of greater moment, and more important concern. Let a man's religion then consist in the observance of external forms and ceremonies only, and how will this induce him to rest in them, to the prejudice of true and genuine piety and virtue! Let him be persuaded

persuaded of the sufficiency of faith to save him, and how will all his endeavours be laid out in matters of opinion only, to the neglect of actual goodness and righteousness of life! Let him have a strong presumption of his own unconditional election, and how negligent will this make him of recommending himself to his Maker by integrity of mind and purity of morals! In short, such as our principles are, such generally are our actions; for as the tree is, such is the fruit. Some light men must have to direct their steps; if they have that of truth, they may hope to go right; but if not, they must follow that which is worse, a false or a deceitful one.

False principles moreover tend, not only to lead us out of the ways of virtue, but likewise to kill in us all those seeds of amity and good-will, of brotherly affection and tenderness, which it was the primary design of true religion to foster and keep alive. Nay farther, they tend to make us act even in opposition to those benevolent affections, and run zealously into all the vilest barbarities of unrighteousness. Let us suppose, for instance, a person to be endowed with a social and friendly disposition, to be of an open heart and communicative temper; such an one, as long as his nature is allowed to operate regularly and is not influenced by
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some superior principle, will be friendly and communicative, willing to do good offices, pleased with the agreeable conversation of others, and desirous to recommend himself to their esteem. But when false principles have taken possession of his mind, they will wonderfully estrange the heart, and put a stop to all mutual intercourse between him and those who differ from him in sentiment; they will dry up the fountain of good offices and friendly communication; will teach him to look upon such an one, though otherwise a good man, as an abandoned irreclaimable Heretic, with whom it is not safe to associate, or proper to converse: and, in the very strictest sense that can be put upon those words of the Apostle, he will not *receive him into his house, neither bid him God speed.*

—Let us suppose him farther to be, not only sociable and friendly in his temper, but of a tender and humane disposition, to have the seeds of pity and compassion thickly sown in his heart, and to be open to every soft and indulgent sentiment: if he were left to himself, he would follow the friendly bias of his constitution; but false principles may lay him under the strongest seeming obligations to the contrary, and, in opposition to his own natural inclinations, as well as to the truth and reason of things,
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may force him out of principle, upon such actions as his very nature recoils at. They may steel his heart against all emotions of pity,—against all the tender feelings of humanity; and, where they bear sway, will make him unjust, cruel, and inexorable. Where-ever false religion hath prevailed, the effects of it have always been most severely felt. It has generally prompted it's votaries to a fierce ungoverned zeal against all those who differ from it, and taught them to observe the rules of neither pity nor justice with the rest of mankind.

This the Church of Christ has been made sadly sensible of, by the persecutions which it received from the Gentiles: and I wish there had not been too many instances, among those who profess his Gospel, of such as have too closely copied after them; who have thought cruelty and death the proper arguments to convince men's consciences; and have judged it their duty to keep no measures, either of charity or faith, with those who have dissented from them in opinion.

And next to being guided by false principles is to be guided by none at all. When men have nothing else to direct them, there their interest, their pleasures, and their passions will take the lead; for no man will quit that which is advantageous
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or delightful to him, without some principle or reason to incline him to do so. Who would sacrifice his inclinations,—— who, think you, would forego his advantage, nay even submit to hardships and loss, if he had not something which dictated and persuaded, that it was best for him to do so? The natural tenderness and compassion of some men's tempers might perhaps carry them a little way,——might make them content to forfeit some advantages to themselves, for the greater benefit and convenience of others; but this, I doubt, would go but a little way. When the advantage to be forfeited was very great, or the pleasure to be gained very pressing;—— when objects presented themselves, alluring to the senses or engaging to the fancy, they would then be apt to forget their natural compassion for others, and consult rather for themselves. So that of those few who are of such a temper (and few indeed experience shews us they are) there would hardly any be found who would constantly and steadily promote the good of others as they ought to do, without the assistance of some good and right principles to incline them to it. —— From hence then, we may see the great necessity, and of what mighty importance it is, for men to furnish themselves with right principles; seeing it

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is hardly possible for them to act rightly, if they do not first think rightly.

These principles, which tend to influence our actions, and make us good and virtuous men, are what the scripture represents to us under the name of TRUTH; not merely speculative truths, if any such there be, but those that tend to regulate our moral conduct. And these are of two sorts; either such as our reason and conscience dictate to us, and shew to be of perpetual obligation to all men; or else those which we receive from revelation, as farther helps and assistances to incline us to goodness, and facilitate our obedience to those laws which our own hearts tell us are wise, just, and useful. — This is the truth which the scripture offers to every good man, so far at least as it is necessary for him to know; and this is the truth of which it has assured us, that whoever does know it, it shall make him free. *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

I proceed now to the

SECOND thing proposed, namely, to enquire in what sense the truth may be said to make us free.

Liberty is of two sorts, as it is opposed to necessity

necessity, and as it is opposed to slavery. The former of these God has given to all men; their being made accountable creatures plainly supposes it. It would be the highest impeachment both of his justice and his goodness, to think he could punish for that which he had not given them power to abstain from.—Liberty in the other sense, or what the scripture usually calls freedom, is what men may forfeit without any imputation upon the divine perfections; and, by their own neglect or their own fault, fall under the vilest and most abject slavery. The slavery therefore from which truth tends to deliver us, if we reflect upon what has just now been said, we shall find to be of two sorts.

1st. The slavery of a false religion, when we were under the dominion of wrong principles.

2dly. The bondage under which we were held to our own lusts and passions, for want of true and right principles to conduct us.

And 1st, To live under the dominion of false and mistaken principles must be most intolerable slavery. If men really have any principles, and are not contented with a bare profession only, they will not (as I

have shewn before) suffer them to be idle, but will have some influence upon their actions, and manifest themselves in practice. But then, what actions can be expected from false principles? not good ones surely, any more than we can expect good fruits from a corrupt tree. He that believes falsely, it is reasonable to think will act falsely; and can God be pleased with falsehood? or will he reward men for having acted up to wicked and evil principles? To say the very best then, they are drudging in a service that can never reward their pains, and, as the Prophet terms it, only *wearying themselves in vanity*. And if this was the worst, sure that service ought to be esteemed slavery indeed, in which men drudge on without any possibility of a reward, and where the best thing it has to give is their labour for their pains.— Such was the case of the Gentile world, who, from false and unworthy apprehensions of God, were led into chargeable rites and superstitions, and perpetually terrified with prodigies, omens, and dreams.— And as to the Jews, their's indeed was a religion instituted by God, and could not therefore be a false one; but yet it was a very heavy and burdensome one. It was *a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear*; nor did it eventually
answer

answer the end which religion principally intends, namely, the advancement of men in moral goodness and virtue. It could never, we are told, *make the comers thereunto perfect*; and therefore for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof was done away: and for this reason probably we find not the rewards of virtue and goodness so much annexed to it, as the temporal advantages of this world. It was the best indeed that the Jews were at that time capable of receiving, but though it differed from a false one, yet it had not all the advantages that might be expected from a true one. It was therefore a service, from which those who were under it might reasonably desire to be free. Nay, it was by most of them grossly misunderstood, and confined their minds to those things which were never designed to be the end thereof; and was therefore in effect to them a false one, though in it's own nature it was true. — So that both the one and the other of these might very justly be accounted slavery and bondage, from which men had no possible way of getting loose but by the appearance of the truth. This indeed furnished them with right principles, convinced them of the falshood of the one and the unprofitableness of the other, and so set them free from the observation of both. —

And thus also does the truth still set us free from all the corruptions, the false and mistaken notions that have been imposed upon the world under pretence of religion, by those persons who have taught for doctrines the commandments of men.

A 2d way wherein the truth does make us free, is when it delivers us from the bondage of sin, and slavery to our own lusts and passions.

But here such men will be apt to reply, That they are under no such slavery, but the freest of all men living. They do what they please without any restraint; and who can be freer than he who follows his own inclination without controul?—that it is the religious man who is shackled and fettered, tied up to rules which he dares not transgress, and who has bounds assigned him which he cannot pass;—that he therefore is the slave;—that in reality this maxim should be inverted, and instead of *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*, it should be, When men know the truth they shall be abridged of their liberty.

But it should be considered, that the good man acts voluntarily in doing good, as much as the other does in doing evil. It is as much his choice to be directed by reason, as it is the other's to follow after sensible

sible things: nay it is in his power (if he would be so weak) to follow after those very things which the evil man does, and therefore he is certainly as free.—But he is much freer. The good man is sensible of all the advantages which sin can offer, but despises them for something better. He knows the utmost worth of every thing that iniquity can give, for it's pleasures are to be perceived at the first view; they never encrease upon our hands, like those of virtue and goodness, but rather nauseate and decline. On the other hand, it is not so with the evil man. The pleasures of virtue are not so obvious, nor can they be tasted by any but those who have made the trial; but this he has never done, and therefore knows not how to make any true estimate of them. He is like a man who sees but one side of the question, and therefore is utterly incapable of making a fair judgment concerning it. His sinful pleasures are as tyrannical masters as the Philistines were to Sampson; they put out his eyes, and made him drudge on in darkness. And this is what many even wicked men themselves confess, who have gone so far as to perceive but a little of the beauty of truth and virtue. They acknowledge it best, nay and wish they did follow it, but that their weakness is so great, or rather, if they

would speak the truth fairly, they are held in such captivity by their sins that they are not able.

Is this then the liberty that wicked men so much boast of? Is this their vaunted freedom,—to have the faculties of their mind fettered and enslaved,—to have their reason bribed by foolish and vain hopes, and their resolution hurried away by violent and tumultuous passions,—to be at liberty to ruin and destroy themselves? Let us endeavour to follow after truth, which will teach us better things; this if ye sincerely do, *ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

From what has been said, I may with justice, I think, infer the great obligation there lies upon every one of us to cultivate truth in our minds, and to improve with the utmost diligence our rational faculties.—Reason is the glory and excellence of our nature, which exalts us above the beasts that perish. It is this in which we resemble our Creator;—it is this which is the foundation of that dominion he has given us over the lower world: and it must be mean and abject in us to have no desire or care for cultivating and improving this distinguishing pre-eminence of our nature. —The improvement of our understand-
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ing is a duty which we owe both to God and ourselves. It is this which is the foundation of our happiness, which makes us capable of the pleasures of society and friendship, which furnishes us with improvements in knowledge and virtue. It is this which fits us to contemplate the great author of the universe, and to celebrate the glory of his perfections. And shall it not be highly blameable in us to omit a duty for which we are so particularly formed,—an obligation arising from the very make and constitution of our nature itself?—Shall we so far dishonour ourselves as to neglect these invaluable entertainments of the mind, which are capable of being improved and augmented for ever,—to give them up for those gross and sensual gratifications which we enjoy in common with the creatures below us, or suffer them to lie buried in sloth and indolence? Where then is this our boasted pre-eminence? where the image of God within us? nay, where is our humanity itself? since 'tis reason and understanding which are the most distinguishing marks of it. Shall not God most reasonably call us to an account for the mismanagement of those talents which he has intrusted to our care? Let us therefore improve them and be directed by them; for they are the light that is to conduct

duct us to happiness. Let us comply with the advice of Solomon, *Buy the truth and sell it not; for the merchandize thereof is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to her.*

To conclude—

As it is certainly criminal to neglect or disregard the truth, so is it much more sinful to pervert and abuse it; and, instead of following that, resign ourselves up to be directed by fond opinion, inordinate passion, by present interest, by fancy or appetite. These, instead of making us free, will only lead us farther into error, and more strongly confirm us in slavery. It will be like following a false and deceitful light, which will not only take us out of the right way, but bring us perhaps into bogs and ditches, or lead us down a precipice to our destruction. It is thus that Church has dealt by her votaries, which has taught them to depend for salvation, not on repentance and a good life, but on absolutions, on penances, on pilgrimages, and I know not what other vagaries. These are the things on which they are taught to depend, and not on truth and righteousness, to make them free. And among ourselves, I doubt, there are too many who

who depart from truth, and depend upon things as ineffectual as what I have before mentioned. Who rely on the merits of Christ for salvation, without having any of their own;—who trust (as they call it) on the mercy of God, without having ever made themselves fit objects of that mercy;—who place great confidence in being of the true religion, and in the performance of it's ceremonies, without that conformity of life which it was intended to produce in them. These, and many other such as these which I might name, have not their foundation in scripture or truth, but in men's own fancies and imaginations only; and when they follow and are governed by them, they are led by error and not by truth; and are so far from being made free that they plunge themselves the deeper into sin. Be it our business therefore to establish our conduct, not on such delusive hopes, but upon the immoveable foundation of reason and truth, as they are made known by the light of a sincere mind, and farther confirmed to us by the help of revelation.

I will dismiss you with that caution of our Saviour, *Take heed lest the light within thee become darkness*; and with those words of his Apostle St. Paul, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made thee free.*

who depart from God, and depend upon
things as mediators, what I have before
mentioned. *Man* only on the ruins of
that, has himself without power, any or
them, who are I (physically) on the
 mercy of God; without having even made
 himself as his object, but that is, who
 place first consider in being of the
 religion, and in the performance of a cer-
 mony, without that consistency of life
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 in the nature of truth, but in man's own
 law, and imaginations only; and when
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 are led by error, and not by truth; and are
 so far from being made free from the yoke
 themselves the deeper into it. He it is
 however, therefore to establish our conduct,
 not on such delusive hopes, but upon the
 immovable foundation of reason and truth.
 as they are made known by the light of a
 free mind, and I have returned to us by
 the light of revelation.


I will finish you with that caution of
 our Father. *Be not led by the light of the
 law, because it is not the law that makes
 us free, but the Spirit of God, who is the
 Father of all, and the Father of the
 Spirit of God, who is the Father of all.*

S E R M O N IV.

On keeping our resolutions.

M A T T H. xxvi. 35.

Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.

 Proper regulation of our actions, though of so great importance,——so agreeable to our best and most exalted faculties, and so productive of happiness,——is yet a thing in which mankind are strangely negligent. Sense and Appetite usually bear the sway against Understanding and Prudence, and mislead them into the destructive paths of vice and folly. And though they make resolutions of becoming better,——That they will no more follow the calls of their corrupted nature,——no more continue slaves to their unruly passions and lusts, but will live for the future as reason,—as virtue,—as the commands of their Maker require: yet common experience teaches us, that such resolutions are frequently

frequently broken through; —that they are apt to be but of short continuance, and upon the next temptation perhaps the man returns to his old courses, and to the practice of those sins which he thought himself so impregably fortified against. —So weak and frail is the mind of man, one moment resolving and the next breaking that resolution.

A remarkable instance of this we have in the great, but we see not infallible, Apostle here before us; which teaches us how little even the best resolutions are to be depended on without proper care and endeavours to support them. The words I have just now read to you contain his determination not to forsake his Master though death should be the consequence of his confession; and this taken up, one would have thought, upon the firmest reasons and surest grounds. —He who, when the other disciples went back, kept steady to his Lord, saying, *To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal Life; and we believe and are sure, that thou art Christ the son of the living God.* —He who had the name of Peter (or the Rock) given him by Jesus, from the steadiness of his faith and confession which he made; —He who had been admitted to a more intimate conversation with his Saviour than most of his other disciples, —

ciples,—who had been witness of his transfiguration on the mount, and who, with James and John, had been selected to be his more immediate companion at this melancholy season;—He who had been warned by his Master and foretold of this very thing, inasmuch that he took it ill to have his integrity mistrusted;—yet this very man, this very disciple, whose resolution seemed to be taken with all these advantages, we still find to have broken it, and in the time of trial miserably to have fallen away. He shamefully denied that Master for whom but just before he had professed he would die, and moreover used oaths and imprecations, in order to get that falsehood believed.

How it would have fallen out with the rest of the Apostles, had they been put to the same proof, we cannot say; possibly not much better, since we read of them also, that *they forsook him and fled*. But as St. Peter seemed the most sanguine and forward, so it pleased the Divine Providence to single him out for an example to the rest.

And if St. Peter, a man of so great zeal and affection for his Master,—a man who sincerely designed to make good what he had promised,—a man who had so many and so great advantages to keep him steady;—if he, notwithstanding all these, most shamefully

shamefully broke his word, and in the time of trial fell away ; how ought we, who are most of us, I doubt, much inferior to him in all these respects, —how ought we to take heed to our conduct, —to examine carefully our resolutions, and to be watchful that nothing surprize or force us from them ! Not, on the one hand, to be exalted with too high an opinion of ourselves, as if we should have behaved much wiser or better than he did ; nor yet, on the other, to imagine, that because the best of men have fallen from their resolutions, it will not be in our power, who are much inferior to them, to keep any.

That ye may avoid both these extremes, and continue stedfast and unmoveable in what ye have resolved to do, I shall in this discourse enquire,

How it comes to pass, or what are the reasons why men so often fail in the performance of those things which they have resolved upon doing.

And having done this, I shall add a few considerations which may incline us to avoid these errors, and keep us steady to our resolutions.

The reasons why men so often fail in
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the performance of their resolutions are such as these. First that those resolutions are ill founded—built upon a sandy unstable basis. —No man resolves upon any action or course of life, but from some reason, some motive which inclines him to make that resolution. —Would the merchant expose his substance to the hazard of winds and waves, were he not moved to it by the prospect of gain? —would the student weary himself in perplexed enquiries, were he not prompted by the hopes of encreasing knowledge? It must be upon some considerations of pleasure, convenience or advantage that we are determined to undertake any thing. But then, if these reasons or principles upon which we determine are of an uncertain or changeable nature, so that they may be altered or fail us, what can we expect but that the resolution grounded on them will fail likewise? When once the foundation is removed the superstructure must of necessity fall.

To make this yet plainer by an instance. If a man resolve to forsake sin from these principles,—because it is odious and ungrateful in the sight of God,—because it is destructive of the peace and order of the world,—and because at the last it will end in mischiefs and torments past compare;—these are principles that never change, but will

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always continue unalterably the same, and are therefore a fit foundation to build our resolutions on. But if this resolve against sin be taken up upon any other inferior and unsteady considerations, such as—the discredit which it tends to bring upon him among men,—the expence which must accompany the undertaking itself,—or the danger with which it seems to be attended ;—these are all of them of a variable nature, they may be quickly changed or the man secured against them, and what then must become of that resolution whose only foundation they were? Will it not be left entirely unsupported and of consequence totter and fall to the ground?

But let our resolutions be ever so well founded, yet this alone is not sufficient. It is too often seen, that men have sound and right principles, while still in their practice they go contrary to them. This was most certainly the case of the Apostle before us. His principles were right, though his practice was wrong. It is not enough therefore that our resolutions be founded upon stable principles, unless we keep those principles constantly in view, and have them always in readiness to oppose temptations, whenever we happen to be assaulted by them.—Were but this the case,—would a man recal into his mind and carefully attend to those

those reasons which at first induced him to make good resolutions, he would be in little danger of being drawn from them. Those principles which at first persuaded him, in spite of all the inducements of sense and appetite, to enter into such engagements, would, if not suffered to escape his attention, most undoubtedly prove sufficient to support him under them. In our temporal concerns we are none of us easily persuaded to give up that which we are convinced is agreeable or advantageous. These are considerations which we take care to have constantly in view,—which we seldom if ever lose sight of, and which therefore keep us steadily to our purpose. In the same manner would those of virtue and goodness, were they alike present to us;—like a strong anchor they would hold us fast and keep us steady amidst all the billows of temptation.

To the absence of those reasons and principles which should be in the mind, we may add the presence of those which should not be there; such as the desires or fears of temporal things, which will affect us according to the light in which we accustom ourselves to view them. If we look upon them as pleasant, ornamental, or advantageous, they will not fail by degrees to excite our desires and draw our affections towards them; or on the other hand if we

esteem them as disgraceful or unprofitable, it will not be long ere we come to loath them: and in this manner we may go on till we raise our desires or aversions to such a height as to make them the prevailing principle in us, and give them strength and power over every other motive. Let our resolutions then be ever so well founded, or those truths on which they are built be ever so habitually rivetted in our mind, still will such desires, if indulged, be able to weaken or wear them out, and in the end establish themselves in their stead. It will be in vain therefore for us to make any resolutions, while we suffer things of so contrary a nature to harbour in us. Our mind is like a soil too well adapted to them, in which they will thrive, will grow luxuriant and choke every other plant, if not timely cropt or weeded out.

Nor will the breach of their resolutions be less imputable to men's not considering beforehand what difficulties and discouragements they are likely to meet with in the performance of them.—He who looks out in time, and foresees the dangers to which he is exposed, has it in his power to fortify and strengthen himself by due and proper considerations. He can reflect and chuse that method which he judges most effectual for his defence, and is not taken

on a sudden and by surprize; whereas, he who has not thought of it beforehand, has little or no time to reflect, or consider what to do, but frequently chuses that method, be it right or wrong, which first presents itself, to deliver him out of his danger. And which can we suppose most likely to stand to his resolution?—The one has provided himself with armour proper for his defence; the other goes on careless and secure till he comes to be assaulted, and then is found naked and defenceless.

But still, though a man does look out and foresee the difficulties which are likely to happen, yet may he have too great an opinion of his own strength and ability to deal with them, which will be apt to lead him into unnecessary temptations, such as he might have avoided, and embolden him to undertake those trials which with safety he might have declined. This seems to have been the fault of the Apostle in my text. And certainly he who was conscious to himself of his sincere intention to make good what he had promised,—he who had resolution enough to go so far towards it as to draw his sword in defence of his Master, and to stand against a band of armed men, ---he surely had as much reason and as good grounds for this his confidence as most, or perhaps any, of us can have; but

still we see he took false measures of his own abilities, which was the occasion of his fall, and ended in the breach of that resolution which he thought he had constancy enough to maintain. And so will it be with us;---if we rely too much on our own strength, we take the readiest means to be overcome. It will be our wisdom therefore to keep ourselves always on the safest side, and to run into no needless dangers. Even innocent liberties, such as always are and may with safety be allowed to others, should yet be forborn by us, where they have any tendency to shake our resolutions. Many have been the examples of those who have trusted too far to their own strength, and paid as dearly for that confidence which they so presumptuously reposed in themselves. When men will run into such temptations as naturally and almost necessarily tend to draw them into evil, their resolution had need be stronger than Adamant to be able to secure them. — *Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*

Another reason why our resolutions miscarry is, because we are not enough concerned to engage the favour and assistance of God. Even the very best of us would be in infinite danger, were it not for his providence continually watching over

over us. The enemies of our salvation are so subtle, so very much an overmatch for us, that all our strength could not withstand them, were he not our friend to restrain their devices, and to set them bounds which they cannot pass. Affairs might so fall out, and things surprise us in such a manner, that there would be no probability, scarce any possibility, of our being able to resist them, did not his good providence so order and dispose them that nothing should assault us which we have not power to repel. If then his assistance and protection be so necessary for us, ought we not in reason to endeavour to obtain it by all the methods which he has commanded?—by prayer—by using it well when he affords it,—with many others? And may it not be justly deemed a great affront, and a just provocation, to withdraw such assistance, when men refuse or neglect to use it properly? But if God should nevertheless withhold such his assistance for a while, even from good men, and permit them to fall, as he did the Apostle in my text, for an example to others, or for their own greater security and advantage afterwards; yet this we may be assured of, that he will impute to them no more guilt than what they had helps sufficient to avoid; nor will he let them long continue in such a state,

but will afford them such grace and assistance as shall enable them to recover and renew themselves again.

Thus have I laid before you the things which destroy all our good resolutions; and from hence we may see what is incumbent upon us to do, if we are minded that such resolutions should become stable and effectual: things which, whatever we may think of them, are of great and mighty consequence;—things which we ought to pay the most diligent attention to, if we have any hopes of happiness, or if we expect any peace, satisfaction, or well-being in that state wherein, after this life is ended, we are to continue for ever.

II. I come now to add a few motives, which may serve to keep us firm and steadfast in those resolutions, which both our duty and happiness require of us to make good.

Let us consider then, that he who breaks his resolution, and falls again into iniquity, is not only guilty of a very great crime in doing so, but there is added to it this black and mighty aggravation, that he sins against his conscience,---against all the force and dictates of his reason. In many other cases a man may have something to plead in his excuse for falling into evil.—Ignorance
of

of his duty may blind his eyes, and though not absolutely clear him, yet be some extenuation of his fault.——Temptations which he was not aware of, and could not reasonably foresee, may assault and draw him from that which is right, into the commission of folly. But he who has resolved against any thing, must in his own heart be convinced of the unreasonableness of it; for it is, or should have been, from such conviction that he took up his resolution. He then who knows a thing to be contrary to reason or justice,——contrary to that obedience which is due from him to his Maker,——contrary to the duty which he owes to his fellow creatures——contrary to the peace and quiet of his own mind,——and contrary to his final interest and happiness hereafter, and therefore makes a resolution against it,——he who, under all or any of these advantages and convictions of his own mind, is yet negligent or bold enough to break such his resolution, most certainly does provoke and affront God in the greatest and highest degree: for a man's guilt will be encreased, according to the opportunities and advantages he has had of doing better. And are not the convictions of a man's own reason and conscience singular advantages to keep him steady? —— Is not he who goes from his resolution,
against

against the dictates and force of these, guilty of a much greater fault, than he who sins either through ignorance or inadvertency? and as he knew his Master's will, and, under all these convictions and advantages, did it not, must he not, in justice expect to be beaten with more stripes? But farther, a man who breaks his resolution not only sins against his conscience, and so incurs a greater degree of guilt, but renders it more difficult also to make any resolutions that shall be stable and lasting, for the time to come. It will damp his spirits and abate his fervour to find himself so often foiled in what he attempts. Disappointment weakens the vigour and energy of his mind, and in the end will make him cast away his endeavours in despair. When we have made many resolutions, and as often broken them, we shall be less apt to trust ourselves for the future, and consequently less forward to make such resolutions again. We shall be ready, as many in such cases too often do, to mistrust our own strength, and to conclude our frailty so great that we have not power to keep them. Nay we shall be ready to think, that we provoke God by making him farther promises, which experience has taught us we are not likely to make good.

Besides

Besides this, the justice and equity of the thing itself,—the will and command of God to do it,—the fear of his displeasure and the dread of punishment,—these considerations may at first rouse us from our lethargy, and make us take up resolutions to become good and virtuous. But when they have been often baffled and eluded, they will lose all their force. Our frequent disregarding and trampling on them will make them grow familiar to us, and so render them less able to raise in us any good resolutions at all.

Let us consider moreover those things which hinder us from making, as well as keeping, our resolutions,—the pleasures and gaieties of the present life.——What have they in them to attract our esteem, or to engross our pursuit?——Are they such as tend to advance and improve our nature,—such as are agreeable to our best and noblest faculties, or such as make us resemble the highest and most exalted part of the creation?——Are they such as, upon mature reflection and when we come to reason right, we shall have no occasion to be ashamed of,—such as we shall find no cause to repent of having chosen?——Are they such as will endure with us, and may be carried beyond the present state,—such as will not decay with our senses, will not change

change with our appetites, or will not languish for want of opportunities, or gratification?—Are they such as will speak comfort to us at our departure hence, when all things else shall look dark and gloomy about us?—Or are they such as will plead for us before the presence of our judge, or bias him in our favour and protection?—No such thing;—but at the last they will be found delusive of our hopes, tempting us with imaginary pleasures, but leading us to certain pain.




SERMON V.

On Self-examination.

L A M. iii. 40.

Let us search and try our ways.


W HEN the Prophet Jeremiah, throughout his whole mission, had warned the people of the Jews of those grievous transgressions and provocations by which the Almighty was stirred up to take vengeance against them, and of that severe punishment, the destruction of their city and captivity of their nation, which was to be the consequence of these their actions; ---when he had long called in vain to that rebellious people,—when the army of the Chaldeans was now before the city,—when every circumstance began to shew them their approaching calamity, and to tell that it was near even at their door,—they yet believed it not, till woful experience confirm'd it to them, and they were convinced of the truth of what was told them by the severity

severity of the afflictions which they underwent. — When, I say, the Prophet had all along told them of these things, but with success by no means answerable to his desires or endeavours, after the accomplishment of them he wrote this book of Lamentations for the miseries and destruction that was come upon his people : where, after many moving reflections on their misfortunes, as well as on those sins which had occasioned them, he advises them, in the words of my text, to do that now in their adversity which in their prosperity they had neglected ; namely, to search and try their ways : for as the neglect of it had occasioned their misfortunes, so the performance of it was the most ready way to deliver them out of their distress.

Thus far of the words, as they stand in the chapter before us, and concern the Jews. But then we should remember, that they concern not them alone, but us also. They point out to us the necessity of a strict observation of our conduct ; — that as a neglect of this duty was the occasion of their falling into guilt ; so will it be of our's also ; — that we likewise shall be in danger of departing from the right way, if we take not heed to ourselves and examine diligently and frequently whether we be in it or not. For what reason have

we

we to think that the same causes should not still produce the same effects ? or that we should be able to stand, when thousands have fallen before us, and ten thousands at our right hand.

They point out to us also, that the neglect of this duty was not only the occasion of their falling into evil, but of bringing down God's judgments also and severest vengeance upon them, and teach us therefore, that we are not secure, but pulling on our heads the like punishments, when we suffer ourselves in the like manner to deserve them : And that these punishments will most probably prove, as theirs did, — either publick and national, when the iniquity is become such, — or more private and personal, if we shall be found so happy as to have but few among us who require it.

As to the meaning of the words, they stand in need of very little explanation, being sufficiently plain of themselves. Almost every one knows that our actions are in scripture called by the appellation of ways ; — that as a man enquires whether this or that be the proper way to lead him to such a place, so should we examine whether our actions are such as will at last bring us to that which we purpose should be the end of them. And here again I must observe to you, that our words and thoughts

thoughts are included in this term of actions, they also being actions of the mind; so that not only our outward and bodily acts are to be enquired into, but the inward operations of the mind likewise. We are to consider all our actions both of body and mind,---the whole of our conduct (for this is meant by *our ways*) whether it tend to lead us to salvation and happiness.

In speaking farther concerning this duty, I shall offer to your consideration

FIRST, the great importance and advantages of this duty.

SECONDLY, the obstacles that are apt to hinder us in the practice of it.

THIRDLY, some motives to incline us to the performance of it.

FIRST, the great advantages of it. It is requisite we should search and try our ways because we are most fit and proper to perform it. Flattery is grown so common in the world, is so much the mode and manner of conversation, that if we make our judgment of them from what others say, we are almost sure to be deceived. Many may have some interest to serve by us, may in some measure perhaps be dependent

dependent upon us; from these we are sure to hear nothing which they think will be disagreeable. Others, who are perhaps more at liberty than these, will not take the trouble of doing it, nor run the hazard of provoking us against them. Nay, even our friends, from whom we should most of all expect it, well knowing the infirmity of human nature, and how averse men generally are from such information, are too apt to decline the irksome task and suffer us to go on in vanity and folly. So that we are still likely to continue ignorant of our ways, if we ourselves will not be at the pains to search and try them. We may indeed hear something of them from our enemies, but few of us have temper and inclination enough to put it to that good use which they might do. It was the advice indeed of one of the chief of the Philosophers to make this use of them, and so to come at the most exceptionable parts of our character; but I doubt, he has found few disciples for the practice of it. Men are rather apt to take them as they were designed, as revilings and reproaches, and to repay them in the same coin; to render evil for evil and railing for railing: so that nothing is to be expected but from ourselves. We may rebuke sharply without breaking the ties of friendship; we shall

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take that easily from our own hands which we should resent at those of another. Besides, no one knows them so perfectly, or is so well acquainted with them as ourselves, *for what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?*

2dly. The practice of this duty is a great and peculiar privilege granted to mankind, which he alone of all the creatures of this world is capable of enjoying. They, even the most perfect of them, who seem otherwise to have some shadow and resemblance of reason, yet fall short in this; they cannot review and consider their past conduct. And were man like the brutes, we could expect no better from him. Were only present good and evil the consequences of his actions, he might then well be without this principle; but he has good and evil, happiness and misery in reversion, as well as present; his actions draw after them consequences which may find him out many years hence, and at a long distance of time from the present; and therefore the practice of this duty is greatly useful to him and highly advantageous. It is a signal happiness, that his actions are not made irrevocable; but that he may bring them again to his view and give them a re-examination, that if he finds them amiss, he may

may amend the error of his ways, and retract the evil of his doings.

3dly. Another advantage of this duty is, that it will teach us what is, and what is not, above our strength, and consequently how far it will or will not be prudent to trust ourselves. There are several stations and circumstances in life subject to temptations; such perhaps as our virtue would not be able to resist. Now he who diligently searcheth and trieth his ways, will first sit down and ask himself the question, *Is he with ten thousand able to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?* Is that stock of virtue and resolution which he is master of able to withstand those temptations to which this state of life or this business will expose him? if he finds himself incline to the weaker side, whatever splendid shews or profitable advances it may make towards him, he will, notwithstanding these things, decline engaging in that course which is subject to such temptations as he is afraid he cannot overcome. Whereas he who examines not his own ways is ever hasty to presume the best; be the business what it will, he imagines he shall come off well, and so unadvisedly rushes into it. Thus for instance, when the Prophet told Hazael what cruelties,

what outrages, what barbarities, and rapines he should commit, when he became possessed of power and opportunity; so little did he know himself that he made that angry and disdainful reply, *Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?* And yet, a little after, for want of searching and trying his own strength, he took upon him the crown of Syria, and fulfilled the prophecy with as much barbarity as we find instanced in almost any history.

4thly. This is the best, nay the only way to bring us again to a sense of our duty, after we have transgressed and erred from it; as the Prophet intimates to the Jews, *Let us search and try our ways and turn unto the Lord our God.* When men are engaged in sin they are apt to go on carelessly and securely, without having their eyes open to discern the hazard and danger of their case; they will sleep on, as the Prophet Jonah did in the ship, regardless of the storm that surrounds them, till roused by this duty in the language of the mariners, *Awake, thou sleeper, and call upon thy God.* The wrath of God, 'tis true, is revealed in scripture against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; it is quick and piercing indeed, sharper even than

than a two-edged sword : but the neglect of this duty takes off it's edge and disarms it of it's force. In vain shall God threaten him who has no ears to hear. The terrors of the Lord indeed are dreadful, where men know themselves to be the objects of them ; but will hardly be able to persuade those who do not consider, that they are denounced against them. This duty therefore, if practised as it ought, will shew us our danger, and make us sensible how distant our ways are from the ways of virtue, and how remote our feet are from the paths of peace.

5thly. It not only brings us again to a sense of our duty, but it also quickens our speed in running the race that is set before us. For the better a man is acquainted with his condition, the more humble and modest opinion will he entertain of himself. He will be sensible how far he is, not only from perfection, but even from that pitch of virtue to which he might and ought to have attained ; how vile and degenerate he is, before him in whose sight the very heavens are not pure, and who hateth all the workers of iniquity. And such an opinion of himself will excite him to be more diligent and active in his duty, than otherwise perhaps he would have thought necessary.

cessary. The more a man finds himself in debt, the more sparing and industrious it is requisite he should be. So the more he sees his defects, (and the more he exercises this duty the better he will see them) the greater pains will every wise man take to supply them. He who finds, that after he has done all he is yet an unprofitable servant, will surely think it reasonable to do as much as he can.—And as it will make him more industrious in his service, so will it increase his love and gratitude towards his benefactor. The more sensible a man is of his wants, the greater esteem and affection must he have for him who supplies them. The more sins and trespasses he perceives in his conduct, so much the higher will he prize and value his pardon. That debtor (as our Saviour himself shews us) who is sensible that much has been forgiven him, will love much; while he who thinks he has had but little remitted, will consequently love but little.

6thly. Besides this, the practice of this duty tends to secure us from many temporal evils. It is true God is unwilling to punish, loth to afflict and grieve the children of men. He is desirous to use gentle methods,—would rather draw us with the bands of love; but if we will not be thus drawn,

drawn, if we will not be reclaimed without severity, he will use such methods as shall be effectual, of which we have a woful example in the people to whom the words of my text were more particularly directed. It is for our profit only that he punishes us; and if he puts us into this furnace of affliction, it is not with design to consume us, but to purge us from our dross. And indeed there is nothing sooner apt to bring men to a consideration of themselves, than the judgment and severity of God. *It is good for me, saith David, that I was in trouble, that I might learn thy commandments.* While things go well with them, men are apt to forget themselves; but adversity rouses them out of their lethargy. *When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.* And as the practice of this duty tends to prevent men from polluting themselves with evil, so does it of consequence prevent all those judgments that are necessary to reclaim them: for where there is no disease there is no occasion for a remedy. If we then would but search and try our ways, we should cut off or prevent many of those disasters which we experience in life;—if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord. Or if his judgments have already taken hold

of us, this is the most effectual method to remove them; for he is a merciful Being, ---will keep his judgments no longer than we keep our sins; but is as ready and willing to recal them, as we are to desire it; ---is ever merciful and long-suffering, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*—And not only judgments are thus prevented or removed, but also mercies procured. God is always ready to do us good,---he openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness. It is our sins which separate between us and him. It is these that withhold his hand and will not let him be any longer bountiful. So that if we love ourselves, or are willing to promote our own advantage and happiness, we cannot pursue a more ready and certain method of doing it, than by examining carefully into our conduct, as such examination will infallibly lead to our amendment.

7thly. It not only frees a man from misfortunes, but gives him great pleasure and alacrity of mind, where his conduct has been decent and orderly. Great part of our happiness both here and hereafter consists in our reflections on a well-spent life. *A good conscience, we are told, is a continual feast;* but without it no other enjoyments

enjoyments can be either lasting or truly satisfactory. It cannot but give a good man pleasure, when he reviews his actions, and finds they have been agreeable to reason and the commands of his Maker;—that instead of a pest and nuisance, he has been a blessing to all around him;—has been a father unto the fatherless, and a husband unto the widow;—has been feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind. It is this which shall make his being comfortable here, and prevent those reflections which are apt to eat into the very vitals of his happiness. It is this which at the approach of death shall brighten up the prospect, and dismiss him with that cheering commendation, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant*. But then this information and assurance is to be had no other way than by searching and trying our ways; for without this our confidence can be deemed nothing but presumption. And if, upon this enquiry, we find our actions such as they should not have been, still if we perform it as we ought, with a serious and good intention, it will give us some satisfaction, that we are at length come to a knowledge of ourselves, and from such knowledge determined to continue no longer in the road of mischief and the paths of folly.

Lastly.

Lastly. Another advantage of searching and trying our ways is, that from hence we shall be less apt to deal hardly or think rashly of others. To consider, that we do not behave ourselves so well or so wisely as we should do, will teach us without immoderate bitterness to bear the infirmities of our brethren. We shall then, according to the Apostle's rule, *if a man be overtaken in a fault, be ready to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.* Why dost thou see a mote in thy brother's eye, but regardest not the beam that is in thine own? is our Saviour's own question; for which no reason can be given, but because men neglect this duty. Would they search into their own ways as narrowly as they do into those of other men, the errors they would find in themselves would make them cautious of censuring their brethren.




S E R M O N VI.

On Self-examination.

L A M. iii. 40.

Let us search and try our ways.

 **A** S there are many and great advantages attending the sincere practice of this duty, which should incline us to a compliance with it, so on the other hand it is not without it's obstacles and difficulties, which are apt either altogether to hinder the performance of it, or at least very much to retard it, and therefore call for our utmost care and resolution in the discharge of it.

The former of these, namely the great advantages of this duty, I have already shewn you in my last discourse. I shall in this speak to that which remains, and lay before you

II. The great difficulties and impediments which lie in the way of the practice of it.
1st. One

1st. One obstacle is the opinions which men are apt to entertain concerning it,—that there is no great necessity for any such diligent search and careful observation. God, say they, has made the way to happiness plain and easy; he has not thrown mists around it, or involved it in clouds and thick darkness, so that it shall be perceived by few only; but made it obvious to every capacity: has plainly pointed it out and shewn it to mankind. *This is the way, walk ye in it.* It is true, the way to happiness is plain and easy *to be sought out of all that have pleasure therein*; but then we should remember, that it must be sought. God hath promised to every one that doth his will, that *he shall know of the doctrine*, i. e. shall not fall into any destructive errors; but then he must make use of those abilities and opportunities which God has given him. For let the object be ever so clear, or a man's eyes ever so good, yet if he does not direct them towards it, it will be impossible for him to see it.—But let the way to happiness be ever so plain, yet that is not the thing in debate; but whether we are walking in it or not, that is the important question. What sort of actions are proper to bring us to happiness we all know, or at least easily may know, if it be not our own fault; but whether our's be
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of that sort,—this is the thing to be enquired into: and to do this may be a task not so easy as they would persuade themselves. For though indeed one would think it impossible for a man not to know the bent and bias of his own mind, or be a stranger to what passes within him; that if the eyes of others were blinded, so that they could not see clearly into him, this would be no wonder; but that he should be able to blind his own, this seems a paradox indeed. But however strange it may appear, fatal experience has confirmed it to be true, and shewn us, that men are so far from knowing best, that they are the last of all who perceive what passes in themselves; and that a thing shall be seen by all the world, which to the man himself shall be the profoundest secret. So that we have every one of us the greatest reason earnestly to offer up the prayer of the Psalmist, *O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*

But be the case as it will, we ought to take the greatest heed to ourselves; for if the way be so easy, as we fancy, our guilt in departing from it will be so much the greater. If we had no opportunity of informing ourselves, then nothing better could be expected from us; but if information be so easy to be had, we then deserve to be doubly punished for our neglect
of

of it. If we were blind, as our Saviour said to the Pharisees, then we should have no sin; but now we say we see, our sin remaineth.

2dly. Another hindrance to our setting about this work is the business and diversions of the world;—these are apt to draw our minds and thoughts another way. We are so taken up with them, that it scarce enters into our thoughts to become acquainted with ourselves. We are in this case like men carried down by a rapid stream which hurries them away, and will not let them stop to look about them. The practice of this duty therefore will be like stemming this tide;—it will be labouring against the torrent, which though not impossible, will yet be found extremely difficult.

But this difficulty will be still increased when we consider, how strongly these things are apt to captivate us, and, by the help of an early acquaintance with us, to insinuate themselves deep into our hearts and affections. And what more apt to pervert our judgment, if we should set about this work, than the affections and inclinations of our mind? or how shall we be able to search and try our ways, when our reason is darkened and the eyes of our understanding blinded

blinded by them? As a man who is drowsy with sleep is with difficulty persuaded to open his eyes to the light; so he who is drawn aside by prejudice or inclination, will be very unwilling to undertake the examination of his conduct. He will much rather follow his own inclinations,—pursue that which his heart is set on; and if his ways be but the ways of pleasantness, he seldom considers whether his paths are peace.

3dly. If a man should get over these difficulties, yet such is man's pride and self-love that he is seldom willing to see how bad he is. That which gives him pleasure indeed he is forward enough to pursue; but then by the same rule that which gives him pain he is as industrious to avoid. So that when a man comes to consider, how contrary his actions have been to his obligations to God and to his own interest;—how he has repaid all the mercies and benefits received with ingratitude and contempt;—how he has prostituted that understanding and reason which God gave him for better purposes, to gratify foolish lusts, and to do things below his dignity and rank in the world;—when he considers that he has acted neither faithfully to his God, nor wisely for himself, it cannot but fill him with shame and regret.

regret. Is it any wonder then that he should turn his eyes from such a picture of himself, and neglect or refuse to practise a duty which sets him in so disagreeable a light?—that he should be desirous to draw a veil over these things, and hide them, not only from the view of others, but of himself also?—and that the more it concerns him to make himself acquainted with them, the more unwilling he should be to undertake it? And if to this we add the fears and disquietude which such a disagreeable prospect of his conduct will be apt to raise in him,—when he reflects on the sad account he is to make, and the severe punishment which (without timely amendment) will await him for it, this will render reflection still more irksome to him. And if such thoughts should happen to croud in upon him, as sometimes perhaps it will not be in his power to prevent it, yet will he endeavour to drive them off, and be apt to greet them in the language with which Ahab did Elijah, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*

4thly. But suppose a man willing to see the worst, and to examine into the defective part of his character; yet, if he be not very careful he may mistake the nature of his actions and think that commendable or
lawful

lawful which is in it's own nature evil. For the light which God has given us to direct our actions by is Truth. This, if we attend to it, will lead us to those which are good and useful: but if this light, which is or should be within us, become darkness,—if our minds and understandings are possessed by false principles, they will lead us into actions inconsistent with our duty, To instance in particulars.—The Jews entertained a high veneration and great respect for the Law of Moses, which inflicted death upon the contemners of it, as the Apostle tells us, *He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnessess*; and from hence it was natural for them to persecute the disciples and followers of Jesus, and even to think that by killing them they did God service. And thus still do many evil and pernicious actions flow from false and mistaken principles, which the doers of them are apt to imagine excellent and praise-worthy. So that though a man sit down with a mind intent upon discovering his sins, yet till he begin to suspect and discern those false principles from which they proceed, he may not find them. But this perhaps is not easily done. It is difficult for him to alter those ways of thinking which he has been long accustomed to. It is a hard task

to divest himself of inveterate and early prejudices, to distinguish realities from appearances, and those artful disguises which are often put upon them. For which reason his search after truth should be attended with the greatest care and sincerity. He should *seek for it*, as the wise man exhorts him, *as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures*. He should endeavour to put it to that use which it was designed for, otherwise he may miss of the information he intended to procure.

And as ill actions may shroud themselves under wrong and mistaken opinions, so also do they many times disguise themselves and put on the habit and names of virtues. Thus for instance, a warm imagination and enthusiastick notions may be mistaken for the impulse and influence of the spirit;—an uncharitable temper, exerting itself in wrath and bitterness, may pass under the name of Zeal for religion;—lukewarmness and a sinful compliance may have the appearance of Christian prudence;—stupidity and insensibility under the hand of God may be applauded for patience and resignation to his will. So that though a man search for his sins,—nay, though he meet with them, yet coming in a garb in which he did not expect them, they may pass by him unobserved, and remain undiscovered.

5thly. If

5thly. If we make a true judgment of our actions, and are able to distinguish rightly vice from virtue, which, as I have shewn you, may be difficult, still may it be as hard for us to make a true estimate of ourselves; for actions may be good and useful in their own nature, and yet we ourselves be very far from virtuous in doing them. We may be honest in our callings, just and punctual in our dealings, and in short perform every other good work, not out of a principle of conscience, not because it is the will of God or the interest of mankind, but because it promotes our own advantage, or advances our reputation. And though these actions may have a good and beneficial tendency in the world, yet we the doers of them may be very far from being acceptable to God for them. It will not be enough therefore to examine our actions only, whether they are good and useful in the world, but we must search into the intentions and purposes of our hearts in doing them; for if our hearts be unsound and corrupt, in vain shall we plead the beneficial tendency of our actions. Both we and they shall be abhorred by our Maker; for even *the sacrifices of the wicked, we are told, are an abomination unto the Lord.*

And not only from our useful actions are

we liable to mistake ourselves, but from those vices also which we forbear to commit. For a man may abstain from vice for the same reason only for which he practised virtue; not because it is hateful and odious to his own mind, not because it is the command of God, but because he judges it to be for his interest to do so. Were but interest or any other temptation on the contrary side, he would then no longer refrain from sin, but follow it perhaps with as much eagerness as he now abstains from it. And therefore we shall be greatly deceived in our examination of ourselves, if we form our judgment from what we do or forbear only; but we must go farther into the matter, and enquire into the motives also upon which we do so.

And as he may abstain from vice for want of temptation, so likewise may he for want of opportunity, or some other convenience requisite to commit it. Men are often withheld from doing that for want of a convenient season, which their inclinations would otherwise have prompted them to pursue. Or they may be withheld by want of power from acting those things which otherwise they would have followed after with eagerness. On which account we ought to examine, not only whether we are free from evil actions, but also whether we

we are so by choice, when we have fit opportunity, ability, &c. to commit them.

Nor indeed is it sufficient for us that we abstain from vice even upon good principles, but we should enquire whether we suffer not ourselves to continue in the neglect of any virtue. We are commanded to do good, as well as to abstain from evil. The neglect of the one is as much a breach of the divine law as the commission of the other. We should remember, that to do good, and not only to abstain from evil, is the way that is to lead us to happiness. Vice indeed leads us from it, but it is the practice of virtue that must conduct us to it. The man who stands still is nearer to the point he would make towards, than he who runs backwards or goes a contrary way; but still, if he does not move forwards he shall never attain it.

Nay even in the practice of virtue men are apt to deceive themselves, and that too when they do it from right and good motives. Thus a man may be compassionate and good-natured, willing to do acts of kindness to his fellow creatures, and to relieve them from wretchedness, when it is in his power; and all this he may do readily and chearfully,—may find pleasure in such acts of beneficence; and therefore as he is conscious to himself that he means

well and acts uprightly,—as he has no private views or sinister intentions that induce him, he thinks he may very justly conclude himself possessed of this virtue. But whenever any of his favourite vices or passions come in his way, then perhaps he is another man; then his good-nature is apt to fail him, and, to support his vanity, his lust, or his revenge, he can overlook the mischiefs he brings upon others,—the disquiet he gives to persons who have not deserved it at his hands, and do such evils as perhaps it is not afterwards in his power to remedy. Thus also a man may be just and honest in his dealings, and he is persuaded too from a principle of honesty and integrity, till he comes to be pressed by any violent necessity, and by that is drawn into the commission of those things which under less temptations he would have detested and abhorred. It is possible therefore for a man to be virtuous to such a degree only, and no farther; he can hold out against such and such temptations, but has not strength to encounter greater.

6thly. But supposing a man judges right both of his actions and of himself, yet still there is something farther required, in order to make this duty of any service or advantage to him. Many persons, on their setting about it, perceive a large catalogue

logue of evil actions, which they think they have no more to do but to beg pardon for, and sincerely to resolve against for the future; but in this they are much deceived. They must go farther yet, if they are minded to make this duty of any service to them; for there is some reason or motive for every evil action: and this is, either some bad inclination, or some wrong or mistaken principle lurking within us. It is not enough therefore for us to search after our evil actions, unless we go farther and discover those principles also from which they had their beginning. And in vain shall we think to reform them, if we are ignorant of the motives which lead us to them. Where the fountain is poisoned, the waters which flow from it will necessarily be infected also; and from a corrupt tree, as our Saviour saith, what better can be expected than that it should bring forth corrupted fruits?

III. I am now in the third place to end this discourse with a few motives to the duty before us.

And 1st. Let us consider, that this is the weightiest and most important knowledge that we can attain, because it relates immediately to ourselves and our own happiness

pinefs. And what is usually nearer and dearer to a man than himself? What interests is he apt more carefully to cherish than his own? It may therefore be looked upon almost a needless task to persuade a man to look into that which is for his own advantage: and certainly nothing can be of more advantage to us than to know whether we go right or wrong,—whether we are in the way to happiness or misery. If Heaven is a thing to be hoped for, or Hell to be feared, if the favour of God on the one hand, or his utmost wrath and indignation on the other, are allowed to be things of the nearest concern to us; then surely the most important enquiry we can make is how we shall enjoy that favour, or avoid that indignation. Even bodily blindness is generally looked upon as a sad and melancholy circumstance; and so in truth it is. It exposeth us to many inconveniences,—it lays us open to the attempts and practices of our enemies,—it takes from us many opportunities of providing for our security, and leaves us to wander in darkness we know not whither. And yet much more to be pitied is the blindness of our mind. The dangers it exposeth us to are much greater;—our enemies, into whose power it puts us, more fierce and cruel; it renders us utterly unable to guard against them,

them, and permits us at last to fall into destruction before we are aware.——Nay, this knowledge of ourselves is so valuable, that without it all other wisdom a man can have will avail him but little. What, if like Solomon, he had all natural knowledge,—if, like him, he could speak of all the trees in the field, *from the Cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the Hyssop that springeth out of the wall; also of beasts and fowls, of creeping things, and of fishes*:—If he knew the tory of past ages, and were versed in the constitution and laws of all nations:—What if he could travel through the heavens, and unfold the laws of the celestial luminaries;—if he could tell the number of the stars or call them all by their names;—if he could dive into the secret recesses of nature;—if *by searching* he could *find out God, or discover the Almighty unto perfection*; what would it signify to him, if, while he was wise in all other things, he was yet entirely ignorant of himself?

2dly. Let us consider, that if we will not be at the pains to gain this knowledge here, there shall yet come a time, when it shall no longer be in our power to avoid it;—when we shall no longer be able to close our eyes, but be forced to open them even against our will. When we come to the
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end of our ways, we shall then perceive whither they have led us, but perceive it too late, and with this remarkable difference, that here such knowledge would have done us good, we might have profited by it, and turned it to our own great and signal advantage; but hereafter it shall serve only to aggravate our misery.

Let us then practise the duty, whilst it will be useful to us. Let no false designs, no evil dealings lurk within us unobserved. Let us not prove hypocrites to ourselves, nor with base servile flattery be guilty of deceiving our own hearts. Let us not, whilst we are endeavouring to cover our faults and screen them from the eyes of others, conceal them also from our own observation. For if, whilst we make all fair and speak peace to ourselves, our hearts and lives be filled with flagrant crimes and evil inclinations,—if, like the Pharisee, we make clean the outside of the cup or platter only, but within are full of filth and excess, we shall gain no advantage from it. The time is coming when the disguise must and will drop off, and all things appear in their proper colours. Then shall we be acquainted with the corruption of our own hearts, and be forced (though too late) to acknowledge that unhappiness and misery were in all our ways.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

On hearing the Word.

L U K E viii. 18.

Take heed therefore how ye hear.

S it was the design of our Saviour, at his coming into the world, to put a stop to that superfluity of wickedness which he found therein,—to revive the practice of neglected virtue, in every shape and every instance in which mankind had been before defective,—and to adorn the human breast with every amiable qualification; so in the execution of this noble design, he left them not to their own devices, but gave them such laws and precepts as are sufficient, when duly observed, to secure them in their duty, and conduct them to happiness.

But then, in order to our observance of these laws, it is necessary that the laws themselves be sufficiently promulged and made known;—that all material differences

ences in them be properly explained, and the true sense and meaning of them be fixed and ascertained;—and farther, that they be such as we are convinced to be within the compass of our powers and faculties to perform.

It is very useful moreover, in order to such obedience, that men be made sensible of the reasonableness, the beauty, and the authority of such laws, together with the deformity of the contrary practice;—that they have set before them the benefits and rewards which will attend the performance, and those disadvantages and punishments which await the neglect of them;—that they be reminded of these things where they are apt to forget them, and have them often called into view in order to prevent their being lost;—that they be directed to those methods which are proper to confirm them, and warned against those snares which are likely to entrap them;—that they be encouraged against the difficulties they are in danger to meet with, and supported from fainting and sinking under them.

Our great master, who was so well acquainted with human nature, and knew how averse men generally would be from being told of their faults,—how difficult a matter it is to give advice,—and how
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ready most men are, for these reasons, to decline it;—who foresaw the future necessities of his Church,—how little men would apply themselves to the thoughts of religion,—how unpolite and unfashionable all such topics would grow,—how backward they would be to exhort and provoke one another to good works,—hath therefore in great wisdom appointed a succession of men in his Church, whose business it is, with care and diligence to apply themselves to these works, to reprove with meekness and gentleness his flock, who otherwise might scarce ever have been made acquainted with their errors or put in mind of their amendment, unless it had been by pride, by envy, by resentment; or who would but rarely have turned their minds to religious subjects, had not the wisdom of this institution brought them to their consideration and remembrance.

The inference from the institution to the duty is natural and easy. If it be an appointment of God, it is then the duty of every one to hearken with reverence and attention,—to weigh and consider the things that are offered to him, and endeavour to profit and improve himself by them.—
Take heed therefore how ye hear.

But however excellent this provision is, or how well soever it be adapted to it's end,
yet

yet experience manifests to us that it often fails of its effect ; that the generality of men are but little benefited by it, their hearts are not amended nor their lives reformed, but sin and iniquity still every where abound.---A fault undoubtedly there is somewhere ; and though something of this may be imputed to the want of abilities in the speaker, yet most of it, I doubt, will be found to be in the hearers. The skill of the sower may perhaps produce a more plentiful harvest ; but where the seed is sown, and there is little or nothing springs from it, there much must be attributed to the barrenness of the ground.

It shall be the business therefore of my present discourse, to point out to you the chief of those ill dispositions which are apt to rob men of the benefit of the word and render it unfruitful ; and to hint to you, as I go along, the proper remedies.

The FIRST sort of hearers, who are likely to receive little or no benefit from the word spoken to them, are the ignorant,---such as have no manner of acquaintance with either religion or scripture. Some there are, who, for want of a proper education or by their own neglect, are so ignorant of all religious matters, that they
scarce

scarce know whether there be such a thing as religion at all :---who want the very foundation or first principles of the doctrine of Christ to be laid in them. Such persons must be very unfit auditors of discourses upon these subjects. How can we argue with men from principles which they know nothing of,—or how enforce the observation of precepts which are not understood? How can we prove to them the reasonableness of a doctrine to which they are absolute strangers,—or how enforce the love of Christ upon a people who know not what it is that he hath done for them? — It is often proper for us, in our discourses, to allude to passages and customs, or to illustrate by instances and examples, taken from holy writ. But how can their propriety or pertinency be perceived and understood, by those who are wholly unacquainted with those sacred pages? — Nor will it be possible for us, in our reasoning upon subjects, to reduce every thing to it's first principles. We must take many things for granted, which, though plain enough to those who are acquainted with the science, must yet be obscure to such as are uninstructed therein.

It may perhaps be replied, that one end of our discourses should be to instruct the ignorant, and that the *priest's lips* should be
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to *preserve knowledge* ; from thence therefore they ought to be furnished with it. —Be it so— But then a minister of the Gospel cannot possibly attend to the particular wants of every individual, in order to fit him for public instruction. That will be better done by other hands, in the time of childhood and upon the first dawning of reason ; and therefore the Church has recommended to Parents and Sponsors, that they be careful in giving them such an education as may fit them for hearing Sermons, and for attending the ministry of the word. —But though a minister of Christ cannot furnish every one with the first principles and truths of Christianity, yet, when once they are furnished with them, —he may prove, —he may explain, —he may enforce them by all suitable motives and convincing arguments. All therefore who resort to places of public instruction, should endeavour to furnish themselves, as far as they can, with the knowledge of religion, and to have an acquaintance with the scriptures ; seeing that without this they can profit but little by the word, and the most useful preacher will become not much better to them than the sounding brass or the tinkling cymbal. —And yet how contentedly do men sit down in darkness ! —How seldom is their
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their Bible consulted, or are they at leisure to converse with God in his word! And consequently, how little are they fitted to receive profit from the labours of his ministers, or to be directed in that way which only can lead them to happiness!

A SECOND sort of hearers, who are likely to receive but little benefit from the word, are the careless and inattentive. There are many, I doubt not, who come not with a design of profiting by what they hear, of amending in themselves what they shall find amiss, or of implanting into their conduct those virtues which are recommended to them; but rather out of fashion or custom,—to spend an idle hour,—or to see and be seen.—Others there are of too light and volatile a temper to attend closely, or who, by a contrary habit, have rendered attention painful to them. They give but little heed therefore to what is spoken;—their minds and thoughts are employed on other matters, and carried away by every object that presents itself before them. Not a few, it is possible, by a wicked life may have made truth their enemy; nor will it be strange if they hearken not to those who bring it to their view, or if, in order to elude it, they busy themselves in idle and impertinent talk,—in

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observing the gestures and appearances of others,—or sink perhaps into an unbecoming repose. But can such men wonder if they find not that which they do not seek, or if the most profitable doctrine is of no avail to them, since they thus put themselves into the condition of those who are incapable of knowing their work? The effect is the same to both,—to those who will not, as well as to those who cannot hear; but with this aggravating circumstance as to the cause, that it is the *fault* of the one, but only the *misfortune* of the other. — Can such men wonder, if, as an example of his vengeance, God should refuse to enlighten those who chuse to sit in darkness, or to open the eyes of those who obstinately resolve to shut them; and, *because they received not the love of truth, should send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie?* — Or shall such men wonder, if they find the motives and incitements to religion grow weak and languid in them, which, by a due attendance to the word, might have been invigorated and excited,—if they perceive the interest of virtue to decline,—if the *holy spirit of discipline do flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding?*

To men of this class I would recommend to prepare their hearts, by imprinting on them an awful and becoming sense of the duty

duty before us. They should consider it as a command and ordinance of God, appointed for wise and noble ends, and which, if it were not capable of answering them, he never would have ordained. And shall it be esteemed a light fault, when he has thus constituted a method for our safety and advantage, for us to neglect and disregard it, —to set at nought all his counsels, and resolve to have none of his reproof?— Shall it be esteemed but a light fault in us, to transact with him so solemn and important a part of his worship with levity and inattention; or to come to it with minds as careless and unprepared as we do to the most trivial and common occurrences of life?

To these I shall add a THIRD class, which we may call the forgetful hearers, who attend indeed for the present, but then they retain not what they hear. The sound of the Preacher's voice is no sooner out of their ears, than the sense of it is out of their minds also. —The truths of religion must not only be slightly attended to, but must be treasured up in our hearts; they must be fixed in our minds and memory, if we are willing they should be of any use or service to us.

Some indeed, through age, or infirmities, &c. have their memories impaired,

and cannot so well retain what they hear; and this is not to be imputed, any farther than it is voluntary, or has been procured by their own default. But then there are others upon whom this comes by carelessness or neglect;—who, having their minds occupied with other thoughts, suffer those things to escape their memory, which they ought to have treasured up there.——Such persons would do well not only to hearken, but to meditate and reflect upon what they have heard;—to give it an after-consideration, and lay it up securely by them. They should, as the Apostle advises, *give the more earnest heed to the things which they have heard, lest at any time they let them slip.*

A FOURTH sort, still worse than these, are the sensual or carnal hearers,—in whom the principle of sense is stronger than that of religion, and whose desires and passions are more influenced by the things of this life than by the consideration of a future state. If these men should be brought to hear the word, which it may be difficult to persuade them to, nay if they should attend to it, and believe it, and hear it with gladness, and, when all worldly considerations are at a distance, be pleased with the reasonableness and beauty of it, and make resolutions of living

living accordingly; yet when they come to put these resolutions in practice, then their sensual desires and inclinations again revive in them, and being the stronger principle will of consequence prevail. The word has little or no influence upon them,---they begin to change their opinion, and look upon religion, not like what it was before represented, as a friend, but as an enemy to their interests,---not as a reasonable service, but as a *grievous burthen, too heavy for them to bear.*

To such hearers I would beg leave to remonstrate, that as it is the love of this present world only, a fondness for the honours, the pleasures, or the riches of it, which springing up within them choak the word and render it unfruitful; so is there no prospect or hope of being benefited by it, till this temper of mind be sufficiently weakened and corrected. We may hear and be convinced, but if our passions be stronger than our reason, we shall find ourselves to reap but little advantage, so long as we suffer them to continue so; we shall undoubtedly follow that to which we are most inclined.

There is still remaining another sort of unprofitable hearers, and they are the prejudiced. And these are of two kinds;---

either such as are prejudiced against the word itself, — or such as are disgusted with the teachers of it. — Some there are, who, through pride or affectation, believe not the word. They are desirous of being thought more sagacious than the rest of mankind, and to distinguish themselves as the authors of some new discovery. To think with the multitude they imagine low and degrading, and therefore are for striking out something new for themselves and others. And what so fair a subject to expatiate upon as religion? — If ever such men hear the word, it is with no design of profiting by it, but rather of carrying or caviling at it; — to see what they can lay hold of, with intent to ridicule and expose it; — not with any hopes of being delivered out of their error, but to pick up something which may serve to confirm them in it.

To these I would recommend humility of mind, with an honest and good heart, open to conviction and willing to be instructed; — that, laying aside all pre-conceived opinions and prejudices of every kind, they would with a true teachable disposition attend to the evidence produced, and be determined by that only.

And of those who do believe the word, there are many prejudiced against it, from
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an opinion of their own sufficiency. They imagine themselves well acquainted with their duty, and to stand in need of but little, if any, instruction. They therefore disregard and loath the word, as the full stomach does the honey-comb. — But granting, that in these ages in which the Gospel shines so clear, men, the better sort of them at least, are well acquainted with their duty, and perceive clearly the truths of the Gospel; yet do they not often want to be put in remembrance of these things? Do they not often want to be stirred up and excited to them? Is it not useful to have motives and arguments for their practice laid before them? Do they not stand in need to be reminded of their errors and misconduct, which are usually the hardest, as well as the last, thing that a man himself perceives?

As to the other prejudice which is taken up, not against the word itself, but against those who preach it; this, whether it relates to the abilities or to the morals of the preacher, will be found greatly to deprive men of those benefits which otherwise they might have received. When they come prepossessed with a mean opinion of their teacher's parts, all he can say will have but little effect, they have passed sentence on it already as worthless and uninstructional, and

till they alter their judgment, no benefit can be expected. The most sensible discourses will be heard with contempt, and the most powerful arguments become unpersuasive. There are none, I hope, who undertake to preach the Gospel, but what are acquainted with the plain doctrines and duties of Christianity; and if so, there are none so ignorant, from whom the wisest of us may not receive some benefit and advantage. The root of such prejudice, if examined into, will be found, I am afraid, to be this, that such hearers come for pleasure and entertainment, rather than profit; they are pleased with nothing which has not wit and ingenuity to recommend it, — which is not set off with flights of fancy and striking turns of thought; but are disgusted with any thing plainly expressed, though ever so solid and useful.

To these I would recommend it to remember, that the end of preaching is not to entertain the fancy, but to convince the reason and to amend the heart; — that such attempts are apt to draw away our regard from the matter, and fix it on the manner; and that it is a sign of a sickly and depraved appetite, when it cannot relish plain and wholesome food, but must have it dressed and prepared for it with the greatest delicacy and art.

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But it may be farther objected, that his method is confused,——his arguments inconclusive,——his motives languid, and his whole discourse trifling and uninformative. Admitting even this,——yet, in the most incoherent discourse, there must be a great number of divine truths offered to our minds and memory, from the contemplation of which we may receive great comfort and advantage, though not delivered in such a manner as we could wish. It is the fault of the hearer therefore, if he does not reap some benefit from the most incorrect discourses, and return from them much better than he came;——if the revival of these truths in his mind has not contributed to fix them stronger there, and excited sentiments of gratitude and duty. To have these things laid before him in a clear and convincing manner, is undoubtedly an advantage much to be desired. It will therefore be the duty of all persons, to pray earnestly for those who are appointed to watch over them, as St. Paul advises his hearers to do for him,——*that utterance may be given them that they may speak the word boldly, with that strength and perspicuity which they ought to do.*——And let them consider farther, whether it be not as a punishment for their unfruitfulness under those advantages which they

they have already had, that God has *removed their teachers into a corner*, and that *the priest's lips have not preserved knowledge*.

From the prejudice which men take against the abilities of the teacher, we come to that against his moral character; and indeed a sad thing it is when objections to it are founded upon just and sufficient reasons. But supposing even this,—why may not I be profited, though it be by such a man? He may have understanding and knowledge of his duty, though he has not grace to practice it.—He may be able to direct me right though he goes wrong himself. I must confess (and it would be absurd to deny it) that the doctrine will make a stronger impression, when it comes from the mouth of a man whose practice does not contradict it: Still a well-disposed heart will not consider the man, but the doctrine, and like the Bee endeavour to suck honey from every flower. Though he despise the messenger, he may yet reverence the message, which is the same by whatsoever hand it comes. And shall I reject and refuse to be profited by it, because it comes not to me in the manner I could wish?

Having thus laid before you the things
which

which are apt to defeat the word and render it unfruitful, and pointed out to you those dispositions which we ought to bring with us to the hearing of it ; I shall conclude this discourse with an exhortation or two.

1st. Let me recommend it to you to be frequent in your attendance on the public service of God. Were this only a human institution yet, it is such an one as is in itself well fitted for the advancement of Religion.—An order of men appointed and set apart for this purpose, whose business it is to apply themselves and search diligently into religious truths, and whose time and endeavours have been so employed, must be supposed, in general, best acquainted with them, and therefore most fit and able to instruct those who stand in need of instruction. — To have stated times and places also appointed wherein they may hear such subjects treated of, is the most proper method to keep these things alive in the thoughts of those men who, though they do know them, are but too apt to forget them, and therefore stand in need of constant admonition, *lest at any time they let them slip, and become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* I say, if we consider this only as a human institution, it is wisely adapted to the cultivation and maintenance
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of religion in the world, and to prevent it's falling into decay. And to neglect even the natural means of improvement, must be a behaviour heinous and provoking in the sight of Heaven. But when we come to add to this, that it is an ordinance of God, which may therefore be well expected to be accompanied with a divine blessing, beyond what we receive from it in a common way, and attended with extraordinary supplies of his grace and favour, it must heighten both our guilt and folly in the eyes of all considerate men, if we can find in our hearts to neglect and disregard it.

Were there no such appointment of teachers, times, and places, but only an indeterminate command for men to be thus assisting to one another, it would then become equally the duty of every man, and therefore be very indifferently performed; nor would the ignorant be likely to find sufficient means of instruction, or the careless to be reminded of that Law by which at last they must be tried, and their condition irreversibly fixed for ever. The importance therefore of the affair demands our attention. If we overlook it, how can we complain if *our light become darkness*, or if *the things that should make for our peace, be hid from our eyes*.

Let us therefore take heed to ourselves
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that we neglect not this duty. Let neither business, nor company, nor pleasure detain us from it. For what business so important, what company or conversation so entertaining, what pleasure so inviting as that which is to make us happy for ever? Let our joy then be in his word, and let us say with holy David——*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord. Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem.——For one day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

2dly. It is not sufficient that we hear the word only, unless we keep it and live according to it. Many there are who are forward enough in repairing to the place of God's worship, who are attentive to his word, and find good thoughts and motions stirring in their minds, but go no farther. This zeal and warmth which is thus raised in them, they mistake for real and substantial virtue.——Hearing was intended only as a help to practice; and is it fit that we should rest in the means only, and neglect the end for which it was designed?——The word we find, in the Chapter before us, compared to seed; but why is the seed sown, unless it be to produce a crop? or why is light afforded to us, but to direct our steps, and guide us in the right path? A man may
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as well hope to attain the end of his journey by knowing the way only without setting forward, as to please God by being informed of his duty and not acting accordingly. It will be rather an aggravation of his fault, to hear the word and not to keep it, as it carries in it more wilfulness and contempt. In hearing the word we are continually put in mind of God's authority over us and of our obligations towards him. We are directed how to perform his will, and pay obedience to his laws. We are excited by the most powerful motives and arguments, and warned against those wiles and stratagems of our adversary which are designed to ensnare us. To be continually receiving advantages such as these, and not to profit by them, must only enhance our account. Every sermon we have heard,—every convincing argument,—every awakening exhortation shall rise up in judgment and condemn us, not because we would not hearken, but because we did hearken and would not be amended by them. Nay, hearing without doing will only harden our hearts and make us worse. The arguments and motives of the Gospel, when first heard and attended to, cannot but strike us forcibly; they are such as will affect the most sensual sinner: but when they come to be often repeated and pressed in vain, they begin

begin by degrees to lose their force, and we can hear them without being affected by them at all. Our hearts grow hardened against every method of conviction, and become incapable of being influenced by any moral motives whatsoever.—*Take heed therefore how ye hear.*

Let us then beg of God, that he would fit and prepare us for the reception of his word;—That he would assist with his Spirit the shepherds and pastors of his Church;—That he would cause their doctrine to drop as the rain and their words to distil as the dew, so that they may mollify the rigid soil of our hearts, and cause us to bring forth fruit an hundred fold.



begin by degrees to lose their force, and we
can then them without being affected by
them at all. Our hearts grow hardened
against every method of conviction, and be-
come insensible to being influenced by any
word, reason, or rebuke.

It is the design of God, that he would
at last bring us to the possession of his
glory. But he knows full well, that his
people are hardened and blinded, and that
they will not be brought to him, unless their
eyes be opened, and their hearts softened.
Therefore he has appointed his holy Spirit
to be the author of our conversion, and to
bring us to the knowledge of the truth.

S E R M O N VIII.

On the Forbearance and Long-suffering
of God.

2 P E T. iii. 9.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

T H E S E words contain in them a reason assigned by the Apostle, in vindication of the divine Majesty, for not immediately executing his decrees, but deferring the performance of them for some time; intended also to keep the Christians, to whom these promises were made, steadfast and unshaken in their reliance on them. St. Peter tells them, that his design in this Epistle, as well as in a former one which he had written to them, was to stir them up both to remember and to attend to what was formerly foretold by the holy Prophets,

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and confirmed by the Apostles of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Prophets had foretold Christ's second coming to judge mankind, and the Apostles had commanded them to prepare for it, and for the dissolution of this present world, which St. Peter immediately after tells them was to be destroyed by Fire, and that *the Elements should melt with fervent heat.*

Vain and foolish men are apt to deride things which they do not rightly consider, or which they do not approve; and this, the Apostle tells them, would happen in the case before us. There would arise Scoffers, walking after their own lusts, who would insult them with this and the like questions, *Where is the promise of his coming?* or what sign is there of the dissolution of the world? Except only that *the Fathers are fallen asleep*, i. e. except that one generation dies, and another succeeds, *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.* The Sun rises and sets as it did. The Stars observe their appointed courses. Day and Night, Summer and Winter invariably succeed each other. Every thing continues constant and regular, and there is no appearance of any such change or alteration. But little prospect therefore is there of such an one as you expect, namely, a judgment to come and dissolution of all things.

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In reply to this, the Apostle shews them, that such an instance had happened already, by reminding them of the old or ante-diluvian world, which, being overflowed with water, perished, i. e. not the Matter or Substance, but the Form and constitution of it.—That as that had been totally changed by a deluge of Water, so it was in no measure absurd to suppose that the present Heavens and Earth (this Globe, with the body of Air surrounding it, which is sometimes called by the name of Heavens) might undergo another alteration by Fire.—That as God had fixed no precise time for this event, the delay could be no proof that it would never happen.—That length of time makes no difference as to the divine Being, who can as well perform it at the end of a thousand years, as of one day. Wherefore although God did not immediately execute it, yet it argued no uncertainty as to the event; but was only a sign of the great lenity and goodness of God, thus to defer it, that sinners might have time to repent and amend, and to prepare themselves against that most important event. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

and confirmed by the Apostles of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Prophets had foretold Christ's second coming to judge mankind, and the Apostles had commanded them to prepare for it, and for the dissolution of this present world, which St. Peter immediately after tells them was to be destroyed by Fire, and that *the Elements should melt with fervent heat.*

Vain and foolish men are apt to deride things which they do not rightly consider, or which they do not approve; and this, the Apostle tells them, would happen in the case before us. There would arise Scoffers, walking after their own lusts, who would insult them with this and the like questions, *Where is the promise of his coming?* or what sign is there of the dissolution of the world? Except only that *the Fathers are fallen asleep*, i. e. except that one generation dies, and another succeeds, *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.* The Sun rises and sets as it did. The Stars observe their appointed courses. Day and Night, Summer and Winter invariably succeed each other. Every thing continues constant and regular, and there is no appearance of any such change or alteration. But little prospect therefore is there of such an one as you expect, namely, a judgment to come and dissolution of all things.

In

In reply to this, the Apostle shews them, that such an instance had happened already, by reminding them of the old or ante-diluvian world, which, being overflowed with water, perished, i. e. not the Matter or Substance, but the Form and constitution of it.—That as that had been totally changed by a deluge of Water, so it was in no measure absurd to suppose that the present Heavens and Earth (this Globe, with the body of Air surrounding it, which is sometimes called by the name of Heavens) might undergo another alteration by Fire.—That as God had fixed no precise time for this event, the delay could be no proof that it would never happen.—That length of time makes no difference as to the divine Being, who can as well perform it at the end of a thousand years, as of one day. Wherefore although God did not immediately execute it, yet it argued no uncertainty as to the event; but was only a sign of the great lenity and goodness of God, thus to defer it, that sinners might have time to repent and amend, and to prepare themselves against that most important event. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

In discoursing farther upon which words,
I intend to offer to your consideration,

I. The great excellence and utility of
this patience and forbearance of God. —
He is long-suffering to us-ward.

II. The certainty or assurance of the
punishment of all such as shall be found to
have received no profit, or made no amend-
ment under it.

I. The great advantage or utility of it
will appear, in that it convinces us, that
our God, upon whom we must depend, is
not a furious Being, ready to kindle into a
flame by every provocation; that he will
not take the very first advantage to destroy
us, and make us miserable beyond all hopes
of recovery. It is the greatest argument of
a kind and benevolent nature, to forbear
long, to try all methods for our safety and
happiness. It is a sign that he desires not
the death of a sinner, when he gives him
time for repentance. It argues him a Being
pure and free from all those foul passions of
malice and revenge, while he can bear with
our provocations, and yet withhold his hand
from us; while he can pass by the affronts
and indignities offered to his majesty, and
not let fly his judgments against us, and
consume

consume us under the weight of his almighty displeasure. And surely it must be a comfortable and most desirable thing to be under such a Governor as this; and every argument, or every instance which serves to convince us of it deserves to be accordingly valued and esteemed.—We may add to this likewise, that he who defers his anger and will not take hold of those opportunities which he has against us, will, for the same reason, continue to do so, as long as it is fit that we should receive such a favour at his hands. A wise and good Being always acts with some reason and design, and will proceed to do so, as long as such reason subsists. We may therefore rest assured, not only that he is gracious, but that his mercy will endure as long as our sins will permit the exercise of it,—until our transgressions have made punishment necessary, and will suffer him to be no longer gracious.

2dly. If we consider ourselves and our own nature, we shall find it a great advantage, that we are dependent upon one who will not take hold of every opportunity which we may have justly given him to destroy us; but will make allowances for our failings, and bear long with our perverseness and folly. Man is weak and impotent, his

knowledge short and his powers feeble, his adversaries great and potent, and the things of this world so tempting and engaging, that it is scarce possible for him to keep himself free from sin, and not to incur the displeasure of his Maker. Forlorn and hopeless would be his condition, were absolute innocence and sinless obedience required at his hands. Alas! *It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;* but daily and hourly is he committing faults and guilty of miscarriages: and were the punishment to be inflicted on him as soon as it was due, how quickly would he ruin and undo himself? Every moment of his existence would be filled with danger, and every part of his duration be big with mischief. For if God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, who could abide it? or which of us all can stand before him when he is angry? It is highly useful therefore for us who are so apt to run ourselves into mischief, that he does not take the very first advantage against us, but will allow us the liberty of second thoughts;—that he will afford us the opportunity of re-considering what we have done, and time to make it up by a wiser and better conduct,—that he will compassionate our weakness, and not exact from us the utmost farthing, but will wait long to see if we will

will amend and return, that he may abundantly pardon.

3dly. The patience and forbearance of God towards us will appear still farther valuable, when we consider it as the proper means to bring us to repentance. Let any one of us cast his eye a little backward, and take but the slightest view of his own behaviour, and he will find it filled, not only with defects and imperfections, but with much voluntary disobedience also; and that were God to have used him as he justly might have done, and as he himself has given him ample occasion for doing, there must have been an end of all hope, and an utter impossibility of ever recovering from it again. But when, contrary to our deserts, — contrary almost to our very expectations, we find him, instead of punishing, to forbear and spare us; when, instead of the severity of a Judge, we find in him the compassion of a Father, and in the room of chastising us for our faults, he uses the most gentle means to reclaim us and bring us to a due sense of our duty; this surely, in a mind that has any seeds of gratitude left in it, that is not utterly depraved, and has not lost all sense of obligation, must and will excite Love and Gratitude. And what stronger motives to obedience can we

have than these? Love will put us upon the most difficult undertakings,—will make us willing to oblige, ready to do every thing that is grateful and agreeable to the object beloved,—will set all our endeavours at work, make us exert every power, every faculty, in order to render ourselves acceptable and approved. The patience and forbearance of God therefore is the most likely method to bring us to obedience, the fittest way to lead us to the amendment of our conduct that can be devised. His punishments may force us to change our behaviour, but his mercy if properly considered, will make us sincerely abhor it.— But farther,—what we love will most naturally occupy our minds and thoughts, and become the subject of our frequent meditation; and when God is thus in all our thoughts, and his mercy and forbearance the object of our contemplations, it will increase our regard towards him, and by degrees beget in us such a sense of the obligations we are under, as will strengthen our virtue in the highest degree, and make it proof against all temptations.

II. Having thus shewn you the great excellence and usefulness of the patience and long-suffering of God, I come now in the SECOND place to shew you, that, notwithstanding

notwithstanding his long forbearance, he will yet most assuredly punish all such persons as shall be found to have received no profit, or made no amendment under it. *He is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.*

Vain men are apt to make an ill use of the patience of God, and because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore to have their heart fully set in them to do evil. Various are the fallacies by which men argue themselves into such a foolish confidence.——Some imagine that sin is not of so deadly and destructive a nature, and therefore does not deserve it.——Others, that God is not so severe as he is represented, and therefore will not inflict it. Not a few they are who hope to find some means to elude or escape it;——with various other pretences no less vain and foolish; since nothing is more evident, than that God will most assuredly punish all such wilful despisers of his patience.

If we consider him as a wise and righteous Governor, he will be obliged, for the preservation of order and decency in his government, and for the support and vindication of his laws, to punish all such as shall be found to infringe and disobey them. He may, it is true, bear long, and try every reasonable

sonable method to avoid it, (for punishment is called *his strange work*;) but still, if nothing else will do, it will be requisite that he should at last inflict it. If God, for the preservation of his government, for the welfare and benefit of his creatures;—if to regulate and restrain their passions and appetites, and to prevent all those numerous evils which would flow from an unbounded liberty of action;—if for these reasons he has seen it requisite to enact good and wholesome laws in the world, for the same reason also will it be requisite that he should see them obeyed. It were as good to have no laws made, as to have them disobeyed when made. But then how shall this be? Too frequent experience may daily convince us, that neither the reasonableness, the wisdom, nor the utility of these laws are able to secure their performance; but that men will be held by no ties, except those of force and compulsion. Some tempers are so untractable that no means will work upon them, except those of pain and punishment; and when this is the case, when no other methods will prevail, not even those of gentleness and forbearance, then the last remedy must be tried, and they will make it necessary for God as a wise and righteous Governor to inflict it on them.

But here it may be objected, that though
it

it be right that God should denounce punishment against sin, and that the sinner himself should stand liable to it, which they think is sufficient to keep the world in order; yet as a person is not always obliged to execute what he threatens, there will be left room for favour and compassion: and therefore as God's attributes of mercy and kindness are represented to us as his favourite perfections, he will at last prefer the exercise of them, before the rigor and severity of his justice.

Supposing this were sufficient, as they say, to keep the world in order, and to secure obedience to his laws here, as far as any thing can do so; yet is this the only state in which God's government will subsist? Are his laws to expire with the present dispensation of things, and are we under no obligations of obedience to the rules of piety, justice, and goodness hereafter? Will it be any discouragement to iniquity, to find that God has not made good his threatenings,—or any support to his authority, to perceive that he has been affronted with impunity already? If the hearts of wicked men are purposely set in them to do evil now, because sentence against an evil work is deferred only, and not executed speedily; what, think you, will they be, when they find that it is not to be executed at all?

—Or

—Or are we the only creatures of God? Are there not innumerable intelligent beings beside ourselves, of different orders and degrees of perfection? What effect such a proceeding might have upon them, or how it would influence their conduct, to see his other creatures violate his laws with impunity, is a question which we cannot resolve. Thus much will be evident, that greater encouragement to violate them cannot well be given. God therefore, though he bears long, yet in the end will most assuredly punish; and though evil men may vaunt themselves, and insultingly ask of us the question in my text, *Where is the promise of his coming?* yet let them be assured of this, that *their judgment lingereth not.* God as a righteous Governor will vindicate his laws, and hath appointed a time wherein *all the workers of iniquity shall perish, while Wisdom shall be justified of her children.*

This arguing, which is agreeable to natural reason, God hath moreover confirmed by the testimony of revelation, in which he has most expressly set forth to us the different lots of the wicked and the righteous. There he has assured us, that *the righteous shall shine as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father, and as the Stars for ever and ever; while the wicked shall be turned into Hell and all the people that forget God.* There he hath

hath warned us, that *the day cometh which shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea and all who do wickedly shall be as stubble; that it shall burn them up and leave them neither root nor branch.* There he hath threatened to render *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; and that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.*

—So that though God, out of favour and compassion, defers for a great while the punishment of rebellious and obstinate men, yet in the end it will come, it will not tarry; though for a season he may seem slack, yet at last they shall be made most sadly sensible of the performance of his promise. It shall be no longer possible for them to scoff and deride his threatnings, or please themselves with delusive hopes of escaping them. They shall then be convinced, that his forbearance was not for want of power to execute, but only because he was *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

The uses that may be made of this discourse are briefly such as follow.

1st. From the consideration of God's long-suffering and forbearance towards us, we should learn a proportionable care to conform ourselves to the intent of it, which,
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my text tells us, is to bring us to repentance. Our sins cry aloud against us for vengeance, and we have nothing to plead in our behalf, nothing else to depend upon but the patience and forbearance of God. This is our best, our only security;—and shall we be mad enough to give this up, and leave ourselves naked and defenceless? Will the shipwrecked mariner, who has one plank only left within his reach, be so inconsiderate or obstinate as to refuse and reject it? If so, will he not deservedly pay the price of his folly with his life?—Or we may look upon our condition like that of the barren fig-tree. Already has the almighty Husbandman born long with us; he has come day after day and year after year, expecting fruit of us, and found none: let us take heed how we continue any longer unfruitful, lest the same sentence which befel that be pronounced against us, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

2dly. Another thing we may conclude from hence is, that the longer God defers the punishment of evil men, so much the heavier is it likely to fall when it does come. The patience of God exercised towards them (whatever man may think of it) is a favour and advantage eminently great; and the greater the benefit is that is offered, so much the

the baser is the ingratitude of neglecting and despising it. The more advantageous the offer is that is made us, so much the worse and so much more closely attached to evil must be the mind that is not influenced and wrought upon by it: and the deeper the guilt so much heavier the punishment. All the while therefore that we are doing despite to the patience of God, and hardening ourselves in sin, we are hurting and injuring our own interests, we are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and adding to the number of those stripes which in the end we must receive.

3dly. From the patience and long-suffering of God towards us, we should learn to bear with one another. How many are the affronts, the indignities, which he receives at our hands? How many are the breaches, the violations of his law, which are committed by us? How many and how great the number of our offences? Shall we expect, that he should suffer and bear all these at our hands, and will we not bear with one another? Shall we immediately kindle up into wrath upon the slightest provocation, and pursue the person who is the object of our displeasure with the utmost violence? Shall we harbour malice and hatred in our heart against our neighbour,
and

and not turn our eyes upon ourselves, and consider God's long-suffering towards us? What reason is there for us to expect this of him, if we will not perform it towards one another? This then ought to make us conform to so excellent a pattern, and teach us to copy after his long-suffering in our lives and actions and dealings with each other, so that we may be *merciful, as our Father which is in Heaven is merciful.*

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